INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLY QURAN

بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُوْنَ الْكِتٰبَ
وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُوْنَ

"… because you teach the Book and because you study it"

(The Holy Quran, 3:79)

Maulana Muhammad Ali

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THE HOLY QURAN

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by

Maulana Muhammad Ali

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Preface

Introduction to the Study of the Holy Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali was first published in 1936 from Lahore by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha‘at Islam Lahore. Later, when Maulana Muhammad Ali revised his English Translation of the Holy Quran with Commentary, published in 1951, he incorporated some sections of his 1936 book in its Introduction with some revisions. Both that Introduction and the original book *Introduction to the Study of the Holy Quran* are valuable writings in their own right. However, the Introduction in the Translation of the Quran is printed in a very small font size in order to keep down the number of pages in that vast book, and consequently it is difficult to read.

In the edition presented here, the two writings have been merged into one book. Starting with Maulana Muhammad Ali’s 1936 publication, we have added to it all the additional material found in his later 1951 work. The content that was in common between the two publications, but revised in its 1951 version, has been taken from that later publication. Chapter 2.4 has been supplemented by a section from Maulana Muhammad Ali’s book *The Religion of Islam* (see p. 93).

For this new edition the title has been modified as *Introduction to the Holy Quran,* to reflect that this is a revised and merged work. All references, whether to Islamic authorities or to other sources, have been verified from the original sources and their locations given in more detail. A comprehensive index has also been added.

Zahid Aziz, Dr
November 2022

A note on transliteration

To transliterate Arabic words using all the required diacritical marks can confuse most readers. Therefore, in this edition diacritical marks have generally been avoided. So we have, for example, Islam, Quran, Allah, Muhammad, and Hadith, which with diacritics would be: *Islām, Qur'ān, Allāh, Muḥammad,* and *Ḥadīth*. However, if the Arabic letter *'ain* (ع) occurs in the *middle* of a word (not in cases where it occurs at the beginning) it has been indicated by the conventional ' symbol, as in Ka'bah.

The use of diacritics is restricted to those cases where the exact form of a word, name or phrase in Arabic needs to be represented, and in all such cases that text is printed in italics.

To make up for the lack of transliteration, and for the assistance of the advanced reader, in the Index to this book (see p. 237) every entry word, which so requires, is printed with the necessary diacritics.

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PART 1 — THE QURAN

1.1: Divisions and Arrangement of the Quran

Al-Qur'ān

The name *Al-Qur'ān*, the proper name of the Sacred Book of the Muslims, occurs several times in the Book itself.[1a] The word *Qur'ān* is an infinitive noun from the root *qara'a* meaning, primarily, *he collected things together*, and also, *he read* or *recited*; and the Book is so called both because it is a collection of the best religious teachings and because it is a Book that is or should be read; as a matter of fact, it is *the most widely read book* in the whole world. It is plainly stated to be a revelation from the Lord of the worlds,[1b] or a revelation from Allah, the Mighty, the Wise,[1c] and so on. It was sent down to the Prophet Muhammad,[1d] having been revealed to his heart through the Holy Spirit,[1e] in the Arabic language.[1f] The first revelation came to the Holy Prophet in the month of Ramadan,[1g] on the 25th or 27th night, which is known as *Lailat al-Qadr*.[1h]

Other names and Epithets

The Holy Book speaks of itself by the following additional names:

al-Kitāb:	a writing which is complete in itself (2:2)
al-Furqān:	that which distinguishes between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong (25:1)

[1a] 2:185, etc. [1b] 26:192. [1c] 39:1, etc. [1d] 47:2.
[1e] 26:193–194. [1f] 26:195; 43:3. [1g] 2:185. [1h] 97:1.

al-Dhikr:	the Reminder or a source of eminence and glory to mankind (15:9)
al-Mau'iẓah:	the Admonition (10:57)
al-Ḥukm:	the Judgment (13:37)
al-Ḥikmah:	the Wisdom (17:39)
al-Shifā':	that which heals (10:57)
al-Hudā:	that which guides or makes one attain the goal (72:13)
al-Tanzīl:	the Revelation (26:192)
al-Raḥmah:	the Mercy (2:105)
al-Rūḥ:	the Spirit or that which gives life (42:52)
al-Khair:	the Goodness (3:104)
al-Bayān:	that which explains all things or clear statement (3:138)
al-Ni'mah:	the Favour (93:11)
al-Burhān:	the clear Argument or manifest proof (4:174)
al-Qayyim:	the Maintainer or Rightly-directing (18:2)
al-Muhaimin:	the Guardian (of previous revelation) (5:48)
al-Nūr:	the Light (7:157)
al-Ḥaqq:	the Truth (17:81)
Ḥabl-Allāh:	the Covenant of Allah (3:103)

In addition to these, many qualifying epithets are applied to the Holy Book, such as:

al-Mubīn:	one that makes manifest (12:1)
al-Karīm:	the Bounteous (56:77)
al-Majīd:	the Glorious (50:1)
al-Ḥakīm:	full of Wisdom (36:2)
al-'Azīz:	the Mighty or Invincible (41:41)
al-Mukarramah:	the Honoured (80:13)
al-Marfū'ah:	the Exalted (80:14)
al-Muṭahharah:	the Purified(80:14)
al-'Ajab:	the Wonderful (72:1)
Mubārak:	Blessed (6:92)
Muṣaddiq:	confirming the truth of previous revelation (6:92)

Divisions

The Holy Quran is divided into 114 chapters, each of which is called a *sūrah* (2:23). The word *sūrah* means literally *eminence* or *high degree*, and also *any step of a structure*, and in the Book itself it is applied to a chapter of the Quran either because of its eminence or because each chapter is, as it were, a distinct degree or step in the whole Book, which is thus compared to a structure. The chapters of the Holy Quran are of varying length, the largest comprising fully one twelfth of the entire Book — 286 verses — and the smallest containing only three verses. Each chapter is, however, complete in itself and is, therefore, called a book, and the whole of the Quran is said to contain many books:

"Pure pages wherein are (all) right books" — 98:2–3

The longer chapters are divided into *rukū's* or sections, each section generally dealing with one subject, the different sections being interrelated. Again, each section contains a number of *āyahs* or verses. The word *āyah* means, originally, an *apparent sign* or *mark* and, in this sense, it comes to mean *a miracle*, but it also signifies *a communication* or *a message from God* and is applied as such to a verse of the Holy Quran as well as to a revelation or a law. Each chapter, with the exception of the concluding 35 chapters, is divided into sections, the largest number of sections in a chapter being 40; and each section, as also each single-section chapter, is divided into a number of verses. The total number of verses in the Holy Quran is 6237, or 6350, if we add to each chapter the common opening verse of *Bismillāh*.

For the purposes of recitation, the Holy Quran is divided into 30 parts of equal length, each called a *juz'*, to enable the reciter to complete its recitation in one month, every part being again subdivided into four parts. Another division of the Book, traceable to the Prophet himself, is into seven *manzils* or portions to enable the reciter to complete its recitation in seven days. These divisions, however, have nothing to do with the subject-matter of the Quran.

Revealed piecemeal but collected and arranged from the first

The Quran was revealed piecemeal (25:32) during a period of 23 years, the shorter chapters generally, and some of the larger ones, being revealed entire and at one time, while the revelation of the majority of the larger chapters and some of the shorter chapters extended over many years. The practice was, as will be shown later on, that when a chapter was revealed in parts, the Holy Prophet specified, under Divine guidance, the place of the verse revealed, and thus the arrangement of verses in each chapter was entirely his work. Similarly, later on when a considerable portion had been revealed, the arrangement of the chapters was also the work of the Holy Prophet himself.

It is in one of the earliest revelations that the Holy Quran speaks of its collection as well as its revelation as being a part of the Divine scheme:

> "Surely on Us rests the collecting of it and the reciting of it." — 75:17

The collection of the Holy Quran — which means the arrangement of its verses and chapters — was, therefore, a work which was performed by the Holy Prophet himself under Divine guidance, and it is a mistake to think that either Abu Bakr or Uthman was the collector of the Quran, though both of them did important work in connection with the dissemination of the written copies of the sacred text.

Abu Bakr made the first complete written copy, by arranging the manuscripts written in the time of the Holy Prophet, in the order of the oral recitation of the Prophet's time. Uthman's work, on the other hand, was only the ordering of copies to be made from the written manuscript of Abu Bakr's time and the placing of these copies in the various centres of Islamic learning, so that those who wrote the Holy Quran might be able to follow the standard copy. The text of the Holy Quran has thus been safeguarded from all

alterations or corruptions in accordance with the Divine promise contained in one of the earliest revelations:

> "Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian." — 15:9

The subject of the purity of the text of the Holy Quran has been fully discussed further on (see Part 5).

Makkan and Madinan Revelations

Another division of the Holy Book concerns the Makkan and Madinan revelations. Of the 23 years over which the revelation of the entire Book is spread, 13 years were passed by the Holy Prophet at Makkah and 10 were passed at Madinah, to which city he had to flee for the safety of his own life and the lives of his followers. Of the entire number of chapters, 93 were revealed at Makkah and 21 were revealed at Madinah, but the 110th chapter, though belonging to the Madinah period, was revealed at Makkah during the well-known Farewell Pilgrimage. The Madinan chapters, being generally longer, contain really about a third of the entire Quran. In arrangement, the Makkan revelation is intermixed with the Madinan revelation. Thus the Holy Quran opens with a Makkan revelation which is entitled *The Opening* (*al-Fātiḥah*), and is followed by four chapters revealed at Madinah, which take up over one fifth of the whole Book. Then follow alternately Makkan and Madinan revelations.

As regards the dates of the revelation of the various Makkan chapters, it is difficult to assign a particular year to a particular chapter, except in rare cases, but broadly they may be divided into three groups: those revealed in the early Makkan period, i.e., during the first five years; those revealed in the middle Makkan period, i.e., from the sixth to the tenth year; and those revealed during the late Makkan period, i.e., from the 11th year to the Flight (*Hijrah*). The dates of the Madinan chapters, on the other hand, are tolerably certain and definite, but in this case the difficulty is that the revelation of the longer chapters extended over lengthy

periods, and a chapter which undoubtedly belongs to the earliest days at Madinah sometimes contains verses which were revealed in the closing days of the Holy Prophet's life.

Subject to the remarks made above, the following dates may approximately be assigned to the different chapters or groups of chapters:

Makkan period —		
Early:	60 chs.	1, 17–21, 50–56, 67–109, 111–114
Middle:	17 chs.	29–32, 34–39, 40–46
Late:	15 chs.	6, 7, 10–16, 22, 23, 25–28
Madinan period —		
A.H. 1–2:	6 chs.	2, 8, 47, 61, 62, 64
A.H. 3–4:	3 chs.	3, 58, 59
A.H. 5–8:	9 chs.	4, 5, 24, 33, 48, 57, 60, 63, 65
A.H. 9–10:	4 chs.	9, 49, 66, 110

Chronological order

The first five verses of chapter 96 were undoubtedly the first revelation, and these were equally certainly followed by the first part of chapter 74, which again was, in all probability, followed by chapter 1, after which came the first part of chapter 73. Beyond this, it is impossible to give a tolerably certain order.

The attempt to give a chronological order is an undoubted failure, as even the shorter chapters were not revealed entire. For instance, chronological order would place chapter 96 first, while, as a matter of fact, every historian of Islam knows that only the first five verses were revealed first, vv. 6–19 coming long afterwards, when persecution of the Prophet had actually begun, as is made clear by vv. 9, 10, which speak of the Prophet being prohibited from saying his prayers, and must be referred to about the time when Arqam's house was chosen for saying prayers, an event

belonging to the fourth year of the Call. If, then, we are confronted with such a serious difficulty in giving the first place to a chapter with which the revelation of the Holy Quran undoubtedly began, what about the later chapters, and especially the longer ones? Take the second chapter in the present order as another example. There is not the least doubt that its revelation began in the first or, at the latest, in the second year of the Hijrah, but it is equally certain that it contains verses which were revealed in 10 A.H.

A chronological order of the different chapters is, therefore, an impossibility, and all that we can say with tolerable certainty is that the greater part of a certain chapter was revealed during a certain period, and this is my reason for assigning particular periods to particular chapters.

Makkan and Madinan Revelations intermingled in the final arrangement

The first thing that strikes us in the present arrangement is the intermingling of Makkan and Madinan revelations. Surely there must have been some reason underlying this arrangement and to discover this we must find the chief features which distinguish the Makkan from the Madinan revelations.

A contrast of the two makes it clear that, while the Makkan revelations grounded the Muslims in faith in God, the Madinan revelation was meant to translate the faith into action. It is true that exhortations for good and noble deeds are met with in the Makkan revelations and that faith is still shown in the Madinan revelations to be the foundation on which the structure of deeds should be built, but, in the main, stress is laid in the former on faith in an Omnipresent and Omnipotent God Who requites every good and evil deed, while the latter deals chiefly with what is good and what is evil; in other words, with the details of the law.

Another feature distinguishing the two revelations is that, while the Makkan revelation is generally prophetical, the revelation that came down at Madinah deals with the fulfilment

of prophecy. Again, if the Makkan revelation shows how true happiness of mind may be sought in communion with God, the Madinan revelation points out how man's dealing with man may be a source of bliss and comfort to him. Hence, a methodical arrangement of the Holy Quran could be made to rest only on the intermingling of the two revelations — the intermingling of faith with deeds, of prophecy with the fulfilment of prophecy, of Divine communion with man's relation to and treatment of man.

A cursory view of the present arrangement

A detailed view of the order in which the chapters follow one another shows the truth of the remarks made above.[2] A brief outline, however, may be given here.

The Holy Book is prefaced with a short Makkan chapter which, in its seven short verses, contains the essence of the whole of the Quran, and teaches a prayer which is admittedly the most beautiful of all prayers taught by any religion, and which sets before man an ideal greater than any other which can be conceived. If the preface is the quintessence of the Quran and places before man the highest ideal, the commencement of the Book is equally rational, for the second chapter opens with a clear statement as to its aims and objects. The first four chapters (chs. 2–5) all belong to the Madinan revelation and, occupying as they do over a fifth of the whole Quran, deal in detail with the teachings of Islam, comparing them with the previously existing teachings, particularly Jewish and Christian, which had by that time become the prototypes of error in religion, the former laying too much stress on outward ritual, while utterly neglecting the spirit, and the latter condemning law itself, trusting to faith in Christ alone. The greater part of Islamic law dealing with the individual, home and civic life of man is contained in these four chapters.

[2] *Editor's Note:* The detailed view referred to here by Maulana Muhammad Ali is provided by him in the introductory notes prefacing each chapter of the Quran in his *English Translation of the Holy Quran with Commentary*.

These are followed by two of the longest Makkan chapters (chs. 6–7), the first of which deals in detail with the doctrine of Divine Unity, and the second with that of prophethood. This latter chapter illustrates the doctrine of prophethood with reference to the histories of some well-known prophets. These two are again followed by two Madinan chapters, which fit in with the context, as they show how opposition to Truth as revealed to the Holy Prophet was dealt with. The first of these, ch. 8, deals with their discomfiture in the first struggle in the battle of Badr and the second, ch. 9, with their final vanquishment.

Then follows a group of seven Makkan chapters — the *Alif Lām Rā* group (chs. 10–15) and ch. 16 — dealing with the truth of the Holy Prophet's revelations, internal evidence, evidence from man's nature, from the histories of the previous prophets and from external nature, being produced to establish that truth. Another group of five Makkan chapters follows it, all dealing with the greatness to which Islam was destined to rise, with special reference to Jewish history in ch. 17, to Christian history and doctrine in ch. 18 and ch. 19, to the history of Moses in ch. 20, and to the history of prophets in general and their deliverance in ch. 21. Two more Makkan chapters follow, ch. 22 showing that the Prophet's cause must triumph, though the faithful would be required to make great sacrifices for the cause of Truth, and ch. 23 showing that the foundation on which the greatness of the Muslim nation rested was moral, not material.

A Madinan chapter, ch. 24, is then brought in to show how the prophecies of the Makkan revelations were being brought to fulfilment by the establishment of a Muslim kingdom and the dissemination of the spiritual light of Islam. Chapter 25 is again a Makkan revelation, which shows, as its name indicates, that the distinction between truth and falsehood which the Holy Quran was to establish (*Al-Furqān*) was witnessed in the lives of the Companions of the Holy Prophet.

A group of three more Makkan chapters, the *Ṭā Sīn* group (chs. 26–28), is then introduced, prophesying the ultimate triumph of the Holy Prophet with special reference to the triumph of Moses over a powerful enemy who was bent upon destroying the Israelites. Another group of four Makkan chapters, the *Alif Lām Mīm* group (chs. 29–32), follows and shows that the state of helplessness and utter weakness in which the Muslims were at the time would soon be changed.

A Madinan chapter, ch. 33, is again inserted showing how the combined forces of the enemies of Islam in the Battle of the Allies failed to crush Islam. The utmost simplicity of the Holy Prophet's domestic life is here brought in to show that the attractions of this world, such as wealth or kingdom, had no charm for him, notwithstanding that he then ruled Arabia, and that thenceforward he was a model for all nations and for all ages, no prophet being needed after him, and emphasizing that it was only short-sighted carpers who found fault with one who led a life of such unexampled purity and simplicity.

A group of six Makkan chapters (chs. 34–39) follows, showing that the rise and fall of nations are brought about by the good and evil which they do, and that nations which rise to greatness can retain their eminent position only if they are not ungrateful for the favours conferred upon them. The next group of seven Makkan chapters (chs. 40–46) is known as the *Ḥā Mīm* group, and it lays stress on the fact that Truth must overcome opposition and that no temporal power with all the temporal resources at its back can annihilate Truth.

This is followed by a group of three Madinan chapters. Ch. 47, which was revealed in 1 A.H., shows that those who had accepted the truth as revealed to the Holy Prophet, though in great distress, would soon have their condition ameliorated. The next (ch. 48), which belongs to 6 A.H., predicts in the clearest words the final triumph of Islam over all the religions of the world. The last of this group (ch. 49), which was revealed towards the close of the Holy

Prophet's life, enjoins on the Muslims the duty of respect for one another.

From ch. 50 to ch. 56, is another group of seven Makkan chapters pointing out the great spiritual awakening which was to be brought about by the Holy Quran. Then comes the last group of Madinan revelations, ten chapters in all (chs. 57–66), which supplement what has already been said in the previous Madinan chapters. The last two of these, ch. 65 and ch. 66, are clearly a supplement to ch. 2, *al-Baqarah*, dealing with the subject of divorce and temporary separation.

Then follow 48 short Makkan chapters (chs. 67–114), showing how people and nations can rise to eminence by following the Truth which is revealed in the Holy Quran, and how they suffer loss by rejecting the Truth. The Holy Book ends with a concise but clear declaration of Divine Unity, in ch. 112, while the last two chapters (chs. 113–114) tell one how to seek refuge in Divine protection against all kinds of mischief.

1.2: Interpretation of the Quran

Of all the religious books of the world, the Holy Quran is the only one that has laid down the rule for its own interpretation. This is contained in an early Madinah chapter which deals with the Christian error of ascribing Divinity to Jesus, and runs thus:

> "He it is Who has revealed the Book to you (O Prophet); some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. And none knows its interpretation except Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none are mindful except those who have understanding." — 3:7

In the first place, it is stated here that the Holy Quran contains both kinds of verses, decisive as well as allegorical, the latter being those which are susceptible of different interpretations. We are then told that the decisive verses are the basis of the Book; i.e., they contain the fundamental principles of religion, so that the allegorical statements do not in any way interfere with the basic doctrines. The next point is that some people seek to give to allegorical statements their own interpretation and thus mislead people; in other words, serious errors arise only when the fundamentals of religion are based on allegorical statements. The concluding words give a clue to the right mode of interpretation in the case of allegorical statements. The words "it is all from our Lord" signify that there is no disagreement between the various portions of the Holy Book. This principle is followed by those who are well-grounded in knowledge; i.e., the rule of interpretation which

they follow is to refer passages which are susceptible of various interpretations to those whose meaning is obvious, and to subject particular statements to general principles.

The Quran establishes in clear words certain principles which are to be taken as the basis, while there are other statements which are either made in allegorical words or are susceptible of different meanings, the interpretation of which must be in consonance with the fundamental principles which are laid down in clear and decisive words. In fact, this is true of every writing. When a certain law is laid down in a book in unmistakable words, any statement carrying a doubtful significance, or one which is apparently opposed to the law so laid down, must be interpreted subject to the principle enunciated.

The subject is very appropriately dealt with as a prelude to a controversy with the Christians, who attribute Divinity to Jesus and uphold the doctrine of atonement by blood on the basis of certain ambiguous words or allegorical statements contained in prophecies, without heeding the fundamental principles laid down in books which they themselves accept as revealed by God. The Unity of God is so clearly laid down as the basis of the religion of all prophets in the Old Testament that, if the allegorical nature of certain prophecies had been kept in mind, the blunder of Church Christianity, the Divinity of Christ, would have been impossible. This gravest mistake in human history was made only by disregarding the right principle of interpretation. The metaphorical language of the prophecies was made the basis of Christianity, and the doctrines of Divinity of Christ, Atonement and Trinity followed and were formulated gradually as the basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

The epithet "son of God" was freely used in Israelite literature, and was always taken allegorically. The term occurs as early as Genesis 6:2 where the "sons of God" are spoken of as taking daughters of men for wives. It occurs again in Job 1:6 and 38:7, and good men are no doubt meant in both places. In Exodus 4:22

and many other places, the Israelites are spoken of as the children of God: "Israel is my son, even my first-born." The expression is used in the same metaphorical sense in the Gospels. Even in John, where the Divinity of Christ is looked upon as finding a bolder expression than in the synoptics, Jesus Christ is reported as saying in answer to those who accused him of blasphemy for speaking of himself as the son of God:

> "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, You are gods?' If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken, do you say of him whom the Father sanctified, and sent into the world, You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the son of God'?" — John 10:34–36

It is thus clear that, even in the mouth of Jesus, the term "son of God" was a metaphorical expression and, by taking it literally, the Church has destroyed the very foundations of religion. It is to this fundamental mistake of Christianity that the Holy Quran refers by giving the rule of interpretation of allegorical verses in a discussion of the Christian religion.

For a right understanding of the Quran, therefore, it is necessary to read it as a whole, to compare one part with another, and to seek the explanation of one passage by referring to another. The following rules may therefore be laid down:

1. The principles of Islam are enunciated in decisive words in the Holy Quran and therefore no attempt should be made to establish a principle on the strength of allegorical passages or of words susceptible of different meanings.

2. The explanation of the Quran should in the first place be sought in the Quran itself, for whatever the Quran has stated briefly, or merely hinted at, in one place, will be found expanded and fully explained elsewhere in the Holy Book itself.

3. It is very important to remember that the Holy Quran contains allegory and metaphor along with what is plain and decisive, and the only safeguard against being misled by what is allegorical or metaphorical is that the interpretation of such passages must be strictly in consonance with what is laid down in clear and decisive words, and not at variance therewith.

4. When a law or principle is laid down in clear words, any statement carrying a doubtful significance, or a statement apparently opposed to the law so laid down, must be interpreted subject to the principle enunciated. Similarly, that which is particular must be read in connection with and subject to more general statements.

1.3: Relation to Earlier Scriptures

Previous Scriptures recognized

The Holy Quran requires a belief not only in its own truth but also in the truth of previous scriptures delivered to the prophets of different nations of the world. At its commencement, it lays down clearly:

> "And (the dutiful are those) who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you." — 2:4

The universality of what was revealed before is clearly accepted:

> "And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them." — 35:24
>
> "And for every nation there is a messenger." —10:47

Lest anyone should be misled by the names of a few prophets mentioned in the Holy Quran, it is stated:

> "And certainly We sent messengers before you — among them are those We have mentioned to you and among them are those We have not mentioned to you." — 40:78; 4:164

Thus the Holy Quran accepts the truth of the sacred books of the world, and hence it is again and again spoken of as a Book verifying that which is before it. The basis of the relation in which the Holy Quran stands to other scriptures is, therefore, that they are all members of one family; they all have a Divine origin.

Guardian of previous scriptures

The Verifier of the sacred books of the world, however, occupies a unique position among them. The relation in which the Holy Quran stands to earlier scriptures is thus lucidly set forth by the Holy Book itself:

> "And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is (already) before it of the Book and a guardian over it…" — 5:48

The Quran is thus not only a verifier of the sacred books of all nations as stated above; it is also a guardian over them. In other words, it guards the original teachings of the prophets of God, for, as elsewhere stated, those teachings had undergone alterations, and only a revelation from God could separate the pure Divine teaching from the mass of error which had grown around it. This was the work done by the Holy Quran, and hence it is called a guardian over the earlier scriptures. Of all the scriptures, it has particularly chosen the Gospels to show in what ways erroneous doctrines had almost entirely suppressed the truth preached by a prophet of God. They seem, moreover, to have been chosen as an example, for how could earlier scriptures escape alterations, if the teachings of so recent a prophet as Jesus Christ could not be handed over intact to posterity?

The Quran as a judge in existing differences

The Holy Quran further claims that it came as a judge to decide the differences between the various religions:

> "… We certainly sent (messengers) to nations before you … And We have not revealed to you the Book except that you may make clear to them what they differ about…" — 16:63, 64

As already stated, the Quran proclaimed that prophets had been raised in every nation, and, therefore, that every nation had received guidance from God, yet nation differed from nation even

in the essentials of faith. The position of the Holy Quran was, therefore, essentially that of a judge deciding between these various claimants.

It explains all obscurities

The most important point to be borne in mind in connection with the relation of the Holy Quran to the earlier scriptures is that it makes clear what is obscure in them and explains fully what is there stated briefly. Revelation, according to the Holy Quran, is not only universal but also progressive, and it attains perfection in the Final Revelation. A revelation was granted to each nation according to its requirements, and in each age in accordance with the capacity of the people of that age. As the human brain became more and more developed, more and more light was cast by revelation on matters relating to the unseen, on the existence and attributes of the Divine Being, on the nature of revelation from Him, on the requital of good and evil, on life after death, and on paradise and hell. It is for this reason that the Holy Quran is again and again called a Book "that makes manifest". It shed complete light on the essentials of the faith and made manifest what had hitherto of necessity remained obscure.

Perfect Revelation of Divine Will

Further, as a result of what has been said above, the Holy Quran claims that it came as a perfect revelation of Divine will:

> "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion." — 5:3

The finality of the Quranic revelation is, therefore, based on its perfection. New scriptures were revealed as long as they were needed, but when perfect light was cast on all essentials of religion in the Holy Quran, no prophet was needed after Muhammad. Six hundred years before him, Jesus Christ, who was the last among these national prophets — the Holy Prophet Muhammad being the prophet not of one nation but of the whole world — had declared

in plain words that he could not guide the world to Perfect Truth, because the world at that stage was not in a fit condition to receive that truth:

> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth…" — John 16:12–13

Among the scriptures of the world the Holy Quran, therefore, occupies a unique position as a perfect revelation of the Divine will.

A correct history

The idea that the Quran has merely borrowed something from the earlier scriptures, especially from the Torah and the Gospels, must be examined in the light of facts. That the Quran deals with the religious topics which are dealt with in those books goes without saying; that it relates the history of some of the prophets whose history is also related in the Bible is also a fact, but to say that it borrows from those books is entirely wrong.

Take first the essentials of religion as they are dealt with in the Holy Quran. Neither the Old nor the New Testament, nor any other sacred book, makes any approach to the grand and noble truths that find expression in the Holy Quran.

Take next the histories of the prophets, as they are narrated in the Bible and as they are narrated in the Holy Quran, and you will find that the latter corrects the errors of the former as it does in the matter of religious doctrines. The Bible speaks of many of the prophets of God as committing the most heinous sins; it speaks of Abraham as telling lies and casting away Hagar and her son; it speaks of Lot as committing incest with his own daughters; it speaks of Aaron as making a calf for worship and leading the Israelites to its worship; it speaks of David as committing adultery with Uriah's wife; it speaks of Solomon as worshipping idols; but

the Holy Quran accepts none of these statements, definitely rejects most of them and clears these prophets of the false charges against them. The unlearned Prophet of Arabia swept away the errors which were a blot on the face of prophethood. He could not have done it by human knowledge. It was undoubtedly the work of Divine revelation; it was surely information coming from a higher source.

1.4: Relation to Sunnah

The Holy Quran is the fountain-head from which all the teachings of Islam are drawn, and it is the only absolute and final authority in all discussions relating to the religion of Islam. The *Sunnah*, meaning 'mode of life', and specially the course of the Holy Prophet's life, is used in the religious terminology of Islam to indicate practices and sayings of the Holy Prophet. Hadith, which means originally *news*, carries the same significance. The Sunnah, or Hadith, as signifying the precept and example of the Holy Prophet, is a secondary source of the law of Islam. The true relation of the Quran and the Sunnah has often been misunderstood, and that not only by non-Muslim critics, but even by some sections of the Muslim community, there being a tendency in some quarters to attach over importance to the Sunnah and in others to discredit it altogether. The truth lies midway between these two extremes.

In what relation does the Sunnah stand to the Quran? According to the Quran itself, the Holy Prophet was not only the recipient of the Divine revelation, but he was also required, in one of the earliest revelations, to collect and arrange it and give explanation of it:

> "Surely on Us rests the collecting of it and the reciting of it. So when We recite it, follow its recitation. Again on Us rests the explaining of it." — 75:17–19

The Prophet's work to be carried out under Divine guidance was thus threefold, viz., the recitation of the Quran, the collection of the Quran, and the explaining of the Quran. He carried out the first part of his work, by reciting the Quran to those around him, as it was revealed in portions; the second part, by having every

portion written down as it was revealed and by assigning to the different verses and chapters as they were revealed their proper place in the Book; and the third part, by giving explanation where it was needed. This third part of his work is Sunnah, or Hadith. It was an interpretation of some portions of the Quran which needed explanation, given sometimes by example and sometimes by words.

In the verses quoted above, such explanation is spoken of as proceeding from a Divine source, but evidently it was not a revelation in words as was the Quran, being conveyed sometimes by deeds and sometimes by words; nevertheless that explanation proceeded from a Divine source, just as the arrangement of the Quran was accomplished under Divine guidance. In both cases, there was no *waḥy matluww*, a revelation recited in words, but the Prophet acted or spoke under the influence of the Divine spirit, being guided by what is called *waḥy khafi*, lit., inner revelation. Sunnah, or Hadith, is, therefore, an explanation of the Quran given under Divine inspiration.

Moreover, such explanation was needed. The Holy Quran had given quite a new conception of religion. Religion was no longer a name for certain beliefs or certain forms of worship; it was a code for the entire life of man, and directions were, therefore, needed for man's everyday life. For various reasons, all these details could not find a place in the Holy Quran and, therefore, while the Holy Quran laid down the broad principles of life, the details were given by the Holy Prophet, the Holy Quran touching on them in only a very few important cases. Again, the injunctions contained in the Holy Quran needed illustration to show how these were to be carried into practice, and the Holy Prophet was the great exemplar whose life furnished this illustration:

> "Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar…" — 33:21

Thus both the words and the deeds of the Founder of Islam form a secondary source of the teachings of Islam. It was to draw attention to this that the Holy Quran repeatedly enjoined the Muslims to "obey Allah and the Messenger".[1] The fact was that the principles of religion, having been made clear and established, the Muslims still needed to be told that they had to take the details of the law from the Holy Prophet; hence the injunction to obey God and the Messenger.

Thus there is not the least doubt that Sunnah, or Hadith, was, from the beginning, looked upon as a secondary source of the Islamic teachings, and, for that reason, many of the companions of the Holy Prophet began to preserve his sayings, mostly in memory but sometimes also in writing. The latter course was not, however, generally adopted, as the Prophet himself had given a warning against it, lest by the less wary, the Quranic revelation should be mixed up with the Sunnah. However, those nearest him knew well the value of the Sunnah. Thus, as Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud relate, when Mu'adh ibn Jabal was appointed Governor of Yemen, the Holy Prophet asked him how he would judge cases. "By the Book of God", was the reply. "But if you do not find it in the Book of God?", asked the Prophet. "By the Sunnah of the Messenger of God", said the Governor-designate.[2]

It is a mistake to suppose that the Sunnah was collected two hundred years after the Holy Prophet. Schools for the preservation and teaching of Hadith were established immediately after his death, and to these schools flocked students from different quarters, some of them committing to memory the hadith which were taught there, while others preserved them in writing. The number of these schools soon increased, as other centres of Islamic learning and civilization sprang up, and the later written collections of

[1] See 3:132, 4:59, 4:69, 24:54, etc.

[2] Abu Dawud, book 25: 'Judgment (*Al-Aqḍiyya*)', ch. 11, h. 3592. Tirmidhi, book 15: 'Judgments (*Al-Aḥkām*)', ch. 3, h. 1327.

Bukhari and others were based on these. Though it cannot be denied that the Sunnah was not preserved intact as was the Quran, yet the labours of the later collectors were so thorough that the hadith which have been handed down to us through their searching enquiry give us a tolerably reliable collection of Hadith. Especially in the case of hadith relating to practice, it may be said that they furnish a reliable source of the teachings of Islam. The collectors themselves were not as stringent in the case of other hadith, such as those relating to stories of the past, but these do not play any important part in our knowledge of the teachings of Islam.

As to the errors which, notwithstanding all the precautions of the narrators and the collectors, have crept into the hadith, there is ample scope for their rectification by means of the Holy Quran, as the Holy Prophet himself is reported by Ali to have said:

> "There will be narrators after me reporting sayings from me. So judge the sayings by the Quran: whatever conforms to the Quran, accept it, and whatever does not conform to the Quran, do not accept it." [3]

Thus, notwithstanding many minor details of religious law that are taken from the Sunnah, the Holy Quran remains the real and the only absolute authority for the teachings of Islam, and Hadith is accepted only subject to the condition that it does not contradict the Holy Quran. Even the hadith contained in the most reliable collections, *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, can be accepted subject to this condition.

[3] *Sunan Al-Dāra Quṭnī,* book: *Al-aqḍiyah wal-aḥkām* (Judgments). In Urdu translation of this work by Hafiz Faizullah Nasir, see report 4476, at vol. 3, p. 425.

1.5: World's greatest spiritual force and miraculous nature

Object to bring humanity to perfection

The Holy Quran claims to be the greatest spiritual force which is ultimately destined to bring the whole of humanity to perfection. Anyone who will simply cast a glance at its opening and closing verses will not fail to see this. It opens thus:

> "Praise be to Allah, the Nourisher of the worlds to perfection ('Lord' of the worlds)." — 1:1

And it ends thus:

> "Say: I seek refuge with the Nourisher of mankind to perfection ('Lord' of mankind)." — 114:1

And this is the theme of the Holy Book throughout. It calls itself *al-Rūḥ* (42:52) or *the Spirit* which gives life to humanity, and time and again compares itself to the water which gives life to a dead earth:

> "And of His signs is this, that you see the earth still, but when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells. He Who gives it life is surely the Giver of life to the dead." — 41:39

This giving of life to the dead earth is a constant theme of the Quran and it is full of repeated assurances that the dead earth will be raised to life spiritual:

> "Know that Allah gives life to the earth after its death. Indeed, We have made the signs clear for you that you may understand." — 57:17

It calls itself *Shifā'* or *Healing* to show that it heals all the spiritual diseases of humanity.[1] It calls itself *al-Dhikr* or *a source of eminence* to mankind.[2] It calls itself *al-Nūr* or *the Light* which will ultimately dispel all darkness from the surface of the earth.[3a] It calls itself *al-Ḥaqq* or *the Truth* which will ultimately take hold of the minds of men and before which falsehood will vanish.[3b] It calls itself *al-Hudā* or *the Guidance* which will make men ultimately attain the goal of life.[3c]

A spiritual force which will ultimately overcome all

It goes further and lays claim to the fact that it is the only spiritual force which will ultimately conquer the whole world and that the whole of humanity cannot produce a force like it:

> "And if there could be a Quran with which the mountains were made to pass away, or the earth were split apart, or the dead were made to speak — indeed, the commandment is wholly Allah's." (13:31).

By the words "the earth were cloven asunder" *(quṭṭi'at bi-hi-l-arḍu)* it is to be understood that the Quran would go deep down into the hearts of people, which are compared here to the earth, which would thus be split apart, with streams and springs flowing in it. Another significance of these words is that "the earth will be travelled over". There were no facilities at that time for going to distant corners of Arabia, to say nothing of the distant countries of the world. Yet so irresistible was the urge within the hearts of Muslims to deliver the message of Truth that not only was the whole of Arabia travelled over by the message-bearers of Islam within ten years after this in the Prophet's lifetime, but within a hundred years after the Prophet, Islam had traversed the whole of

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[1] 10:57.

[2] See 15:9, 21:10, 43:5. The word *dhikr* may be translated as *reminder* or *a source of eminence*

[3a] 7:157. [3b] 17:81. [3c] 72:13.

the known world, spreading from the farthest East in China to the farthest West in Spain. As regards the last statement, "the dead were made to speak," it is again a matter of history. Those who were dead spiritually now spoke with such power that the whole earth from end to end responded to their call. Similarly, it is stated:

> "If We had sent down this Quran on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting apart… " — 59:21

All opposition to it was to be swept away:

> "And leave Me and the deniers, possessors of plenty, and give them respite for a little while." — 73:11

In other words, the opposition would only be temporary. And it is repeated three times that the Quran was ultimately to prevail over the whole world:

> "He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions…" — 61:9, 48:28, 9:33

Miraculous nature

The Holy Quran claims to be the greatest miracle which was vouchsafed to a prophet. It is a miracle the like of which could not be produced even if all mankind should combine together. This claim to uniqueness was not an after-thought on the Prophet's part. It was consistently advanced from first to last as an argument of its Divine origin. As early as the fifth year of the Prophet's mission, when there was no sign of the Quran finding acceptance in Arabia, to say nothing of the whole world, the claim to uniqueness was put forward in the clearest words:

> "If people and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Quran, they could not bring the like of it, though they helped one another." — 17:88

Towards the close of the Makkah period, when the people had shown themselves to be deaf to all appeals, the same claim was advanced again, reducing the demand to the production of ten chapters like those of the Holy Quran:

> "Or, say they: He has forged it. Say: Then bring ten forged chapters like it, and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful." — 11:13

This was soon followed by the still more forcible claim that human effort could not produce even a single chapter like it:

> "Or say they: He has forged it? Say: Then bring a chapter like it, and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful." — 10:38

After the flight to Madinah, when the Holy Prophet came into contact with the Jews who had the books of the prophets with them, the claim to the uniqueness of the Quran was still repeated in the same forcible words:

> "And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful." — 2:23

The golden days of Arabic poetry were those which immediately preceded the time of the Holy Prophet, yet history bears clear testimony to the fact that the Arabs never attempted to dispute the claim of the Holy Quran. Why? Did they not consider this matter sufficiently serious? They no doubt looked upon the Prophet at first as a mere visionary and then as a poet, but they soon began to realize the serious situation. Three or four years of work had brought to the Prophet's banner a band of over one hundred devoted followers who, rather than give up their faith in him, had shown their readiness to suffer every torture and every privation, who had left their very country to take shelter in a neighbouring land. The opponents of Islam had taken the matter so

seriously that, unable to seize the flying Muslims in their pursuit of them, they sent a deputation to persuade the Negus to hand over to them their kinsmen.

They had seen how deep-rooted was faith in the hearts of those who had accepted the life-giving message of the Quran; they had tried all means to put a stop to the activities of the Prophet; they had persecuted him and his followers; they had put as much pressure as they could on Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, to hand him over to them; they had sent deputation after deputation to dissuade the Prophet from speaking against their ancestral religion; and, therefore, if they could silence the Prophet by accepting his challenge to produce a chapter like the Holy Quran, they would surely have done it. Being harassed with the question again and again, they made the empty boast that, if they pleased, they could say the like of it, as it contained nothing but stories of the ancients (8:31); but they knew well that stories could not bring about the transformation which the Quran was working in the lives of a dead nation, and hence they never made a serious attempt to bring forward anything to answer the challenge of the Quran.

The great gift which the Quran claimed from first to last as its special privilege was guidance, the purifying of man from the pollution of sin, and making him fulfil the purpose of life by the development of the faculties with which he was endowed. It opens with the statement that the Quran offers guidance to humanity to reach the great goal of life:

> "This Book, in which there is no doubt, is a guide to those who keep their duty…" — 2:2

Its purifying power was so great that those who accepted the message had their lives entirely transformed. Moreover, its convincing power was simply irresistible. The Arabs had strongly resisted long-sustained and influential Jewish and Christian efforts to give up their idolatry and superstitions, and monotheism had never appealed to them as a nation; but the message of the Quran,

notwithstanding all the efforts of the leaders to dissuade people from listening to it and with all their scoffing and jeering at it, made quite a different impression. It touched their very souls though, for the sake of their national honour, they would not accept it. Some instances are given below.

1. When the 53rd chapter, which ends with a commandment to prostrate oneself, was recited by the Holy Prophet in an assembly containing Muslims as well as idolaters, even the latter fell down in prostration, with the single exception of Umayyah ibn Khalaf, who raised some gravel to his forehead.[4]

2. When Abu Bakr recited the Quran aloud in the courtyard of his house, which was situated on a public way, the idolaters objected and sanctioned Abu Bakr's staying at Makkah only on condition that he would not recite the Quran aloud, because, they said, women and children were carried away by it.[5]

3. On another occasion, when Utbah ibn Rabi'a came to the Holy Prophet with a message from the Quraish that, if he desisted from speaking of their national gods, they were prepared to accept him as their chief and to offer what he desired, the Holy Prophet read out to him the opening verses of the 4lst chapter. He was so impressed with the words and was such a changed man when he went back to the Quraish leaders and asked them not to oppose the Prophet, for what he had heard from him was neither poetry, nor magic, nor a soothsayer's utterance, that his friends had to tell him that he was under the magic spell of Muhammad.[6]

4. Umar went out determined to put an end to the Prophet's life but, on listening to the first part of the 20th chapter, at his

[4] Bukhari, book 65: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 4 under *Sūrah* 53, hadith 4863.

[5] Bukhari, book 39: *Al-Kafālah,* ch. 4, hadith 2297.

[6] Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* translated by A. Guillaume as *The Life of Muhammad,* Oxford, 1955, pp. 132–133.

> sister's house, his enmity gave place to devotion, and hatred was changed into admiration.[7]

The driving force of the Quran was absolutely irresistible. It flowed as a torrent from the mountain-top and carried away everything with it.

Unparalleled transformation wrought by the Quran

In fact, the transformation wrought by the Holy Quran is unparalleled in the history of the world. No other reformer brought about such an entire change in the lives of a whole nation in his lifetime. The Quran found the Arabs worshippers of idols, stones, trees, heaps of sand, and yet, within less than a quarter of a century, the worship of the One God ruled the whole country, idolatry being wiped out from one end to the other. It swept away all superstitions and gave in their place the most rational religion that the world could imagine. The Arab who prided himself in his ignorance had, as if by a magician's wand, become the lover of knowledge, drinking deep at every fountain of learning to which he could get access. This was the direct effect of the teachings of the Quran, which not only appealed to reason, ever and anon, but declared man's thirst for knowledge to be insatiable, when it directed the Prophet himself to pray:

> "O my Lord, increase me in knowledge." — 20:114

Not only had the Quran swept away the deep vices and barefaced immorality of the Arab; it had also inspired him with a burning desire for the best and noblest deeds in the service of humanity. The burying alive of the daughter, the marriage with a step-mother, and loose sex relations had given place to equal respect for the offspring, whether male or female, to equal rights of inheritance for father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, husband and wife, to the chastest relations of sex and to placing the highest value on sexual morality and the chastity

[7] *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh,* translated by A. Guillaume, as cited above, pp. 156–157.

of woman. Drunkenness, to which Arabia had been addicted from time immemorial, disappeared so entirely that the very goblets and the vessels which were used for drinking and keeping wine could no more be found and, greatest of all, from an Arabia, the various elements of which were so constantly at war with one another that the whole country was about to perish, being "on the brink of a pit of fire" (3:103), as the Quran so beautifully and so tersely puts it — from an Arabia full of these jarring and warring elements, the Quran welded together a nation, a united nation full of life and vigour, before whose onward march the greatest kingdoms of the world crumbled as if they were but toys before the reality of the new faith.

No faith ever imparted such a new life to its votaries on such a wide scale — a life affecting all branches of human activity; a transformation of the individual, of the family, of the society, of the nation, of the country; an awakening material as well as moral, intellectual as well as spiritual. The Quran effected a transformation of humanity from the lowest depths of degradation to the highest pinnacle of civilization within an incredibly short time where centuries of reformation work had proved fruitless. To its unparalleled nature, testimony is borne by the non-Muslim, sometimes anti-Muslim, historian. Here are a few instances:

> "From time beyond memory, Mecca and the whole Peninsula had been steeped in spiritual torpor. The slight and transient influences of Judaism, Christianity, or philosophical inquiry, upon the Arab mind had been but as the ruffling here and there of the surface of a quiet lake; all remained still and motionless below. The people were sunk in superstition, cruelty, and vice. … Their religion was a gross idolatry; and their faith the dark superstitious dread of unseen beings…
>
> Thirteen years before the Hijra, Mecca lay lifeless in this debased state. What a change had those thirteen years now produced! A band of several hundred persons had

rejected idolatry, adopted the worship of One God, and surrendered themselves implicitly to the guidance of what they believed a Revelation from Him …

Jewish truth had long sounded in the ears of the men of Medina; but it was not until they heard the spirit-stirring strains of the Arabian Prophet that they too awoke from their slumber, and sprang suddenly into a new and earnest life." [8]

"A more disunited people it would be hard to find, till suddenly, the miracle took place! A man arose who, by his personality and by his claim to direct divine guidance, actually brought about the impossible — namely, the union of all these warring factions." [9]

"And yet we may truly say that no history can boast events that strike the imagination in a more lively manner, or can be more surprising in themselves, than those we meet with in the lives of the first Muslims; whether we consider the Great Chief, or his ministers, the most illustrious of men; whether we take an account of the manners of the several countries he conquered; or observe the courage, virtue, and sentiments that equally prevailed among his generals and soldiers." [10]

"That the best of Arab writers has never succeeded in producing anything equal in merit to the Quran itself is not surprising." [11]

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[8] Sir William Muir, *The Life of Mohammad,* revised edition by T.H. Weir, 1912, ch. 7, pp. 161–162.

[9] Thomas Lyell, *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia,* London, 1923, p. 99; re-published in 1991 and 2001, edited by Paul Rich, as *Iraq and Imperialism.*

[10] *The Life of Mahomet* by the Count of Boulainvilliers, English Translation, published 1752, p. 4.

[11] E.H. Palmer's Introduction in his *English Translation of the Quran*, Sacred Books of the East series, vol. 6, p. lv.

> "It is the one miracle claimed by Muhammad — his standing miracle, he called it — and a miracle indeed it is." [12]
>
> "Never has a people been led more rapidly to civilization, such as it was, than were the Arabs through Islam." [13]
>
> "The Quran is unapproachable as regards convincing power, eloquence, and even composition… and to it was also indirectly due the marvellous development of all branches of science in the Moslem world." [14]
>
> "Here, therefore, its merits as a literary production should, perhaps, not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muhammad's contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well-organized body, animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history." [15]

Two other unique characteristics

The marvellous effect produced by the Holy Quran on the minds of those who first came into contact with it, the unparalleled revolution brought about in the world, the uplift of not one but many

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[12] Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, London, 1874, Lecture IV, p. 237.

[13] *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, by H. Hirschfeld, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1902, p. 5.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 8, 9.

[15] Dr F. Steingass, in *A Dictionary of Islam*, by T.P. Hughes, art. 'Quran', p. 528, col. 1.

nations from the depth of degradation to the height of civilization is, however, not the only characteristic which establishes its claim to uniqueness. It possesses two other characteristics equally unique — the wealth of ideas and the beauty of style — and these two combined with the effect it produced are the three things which raise the Quran to an eminence to which no other book has ever aspired and which make an imitation of it impossible.

In fact, the effect produced by the Holy Quran is not a magical mystery. It was merely the greatness and reasonableness of the ideas clothed in the best of forms that appealed to the heart of man and, taking deep root in it, became the driving power to the great goal of life. A blaze of light was cast on all the great questions which had hitherto puzzled man, and the way was thus cleared for onward march and progress. Hence it is, that one of the names by which the Holy Book speaks of itself is *al-Burhān*, or the Clear Argument, showing that argument was the weapon which it used to conquer the heart of man; and, as it appealed to reason and not to sentiment, its conquests were so far-reaching and permanent that it swept away all mysteries and dispelled all darkness. It is also called *al-Bayān*, or the Explanation, indicating that it had removed all obscurities in religious problems. It claimed not only to have perfected religion (5:3), and thus to have stated all religious truths needed for the moral and spiritual advancement of man, but also to have dealt with all objections to its truth:

> "And they cannot bring you a question, but We have brought you the truth and the best explanation." — 25:33

Style and Diction

A few more words on the outer garb in which the grand life-giving ideas of the Quran are clothed and I shall have done with this subject. The style and diction of the Quran have been universally praised. In the *Preliminary Discourse* to his translation of the Holy Quran, George Sale says:

> "The Koran is universally allowed to be written with the utmost elegance and purity of language, in the dialect of the tribe of the Koreish, the most noble and polite of all the Arabians, but with some mixture, though very rarely, of other dialects. It is confessedly the standard of the Arabic tongue…"

And again:

> "The style of the Koran is generally beautiful and fluent … and in many places, especially where the majesty and the attributes of God are described, sublime and magnificent…" [16]

What, however, establishes the Quran's claim to uniqueness even in the outward form, apart from its subject and the effect produced, is the permanent hold that it has kept on the Arabic language itself, the fact that it remains forever the standard by which the beauty of style and diction may be judged in Arabic literature. No other book in the world can be credited with even the achievement of keeping alive a language for thirteen centuries; the Quran has done this, attaining to the eminence of being the standard of eloquence for so long, and of retaining that position while the nation speaking it emerged from oblivion to become the leader of civilization in the world, leaving its home to settle in far distant lands where Arabic became either the spoken language of the masses or at least their literary language. Such is the incredible achievement of the Holy Quran.

It is true that the Arabs had a literary language before the Quran — the language of poetry, which, notwithstanding slight dialectic differences, conformed to one standard — but the scope of that poetry was very limited. Their most eloquent themes rarely went beyond the praise of wine and woman or horse and sword. In the condition in which Arabic was before the advent of Islam, it

[16] See Section III. In the fifth edition, published 1856, see p. 43 and p. 44.

would soon have shared the fate of the sister languages of the Semitic group. It was the Quran which made it the language of a civilized world from the Oxus to the Atlantic. Whatever changes spoken Arabic, like any other language, may have undergone, literary Arabic is to this day the Arabic of the Quran, and the Quran remains its one masterpiece.

Contrast between revelation at Makkah and at Madinah

European criticism has generally blundered in its opinion that the eloquence of the Quran is not maintained to the last and that the force of the first revelations is not seen in later revelations. The earlier Makkah revelation is said to be rhetorical, while the later Makkah revelation and the Madinah revelation are said to be prosaic and less enthusiastic. This division is fantastic, not real. If, in calling the earlier revelation rhetorical, there is any insinuation that the language is made artificially forceful to produce an effect on the minds of hearers, the statement is utterly erroneous. The one characteristic of the Quran is its freedom from artificiality. The language is simple and natural. It is also forceful, but it is the forcefulness of the natural flow, like the flow of the torrent from a height. "Sincerity, in all senses," as Carlyle puts it, "seems to me the merit of the Quran." [17]

It is rhetorical in the sense that the grand ideas clothed in beautiful language as conveyed by the Holy Quran did influence the minds of people and do influence them now; but in this respect no distinction can be made between earlier and later revelations. As I have already quoted from Dr Steingass, if the effect produced on the minds of the hearers did not diminish as years went on — — it, in fact, increased — then there is not the least reason for the assertion that the eloquence of the Quran was not maintained, its powerfulness and its convincing force being a clear indication of its eloquence. Certainly the eloquence of the later revelation is of

[17] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, New York, 1893, Lecture 2: 'The Hero as Prophet', p. 75.

a different nature from that of the first revelation, and the difference is due to the difference of the subject-matter.

The early Makkah revelations of the Quran deal with that grand theme, the power, majesty, and glory of God and His judgment of good and evil, and the subject-matter lends a loftiness and grandeur to the composition. A description of the power and glory of God must be grand, whether in the Vedas or the Bible or the Quran, but in the Quran its grandeur is simply unapproachable, because the ideas are loftier than those in any other book. The shortness of the sentences is, however, due to their affirmatory or prophetical nature; it is like the seed giving forth its first blossom which is naturally small and delicate in comparison with the form which it achieves later. Here there is an appeal to human nature, an appeal to man to think and reflect, to see within himself. Here the Divine judgment of good and evil is very often described in the form of a prophecy. These characteristics of the subject and the method in which it is dealt with make the style of the earlier revelation what it is — sublime, enthusiastic, fascinating, pithy.

Truth, however, had to be established by every possible means. The hand of God is working everywhere; Divine judgment is near at hand, in fact working every moment; such was the assertion, and it had to be strengthened. There are short references to earlier history in the earliest revelations, but this phase had now to be elaborated. How Divine judgment of good and evil had been working in the history of the world, had to be explained. Hence, later revelation deals at great length with the histories of the previous people, and the nature of the style adopted is necessarily changed. The appeal is still as effective as in the earlier revelation — it is only in another direction.

There is yet a third phase upon which revelation enters after the flight to Madinah. The object of revelation was to bring about a change in the life of the individual and in the life of the nation. The object of the earlier Makkah revelation was to produce a living belief in the majesty and power of God and in the reality of the

Divine judgment of good and evil, such a belief inspiring man with the motive-power which could enable him to attain the object of his life. The Madinah revelation, on the other hand, was needed to point out the way itself. The goal of life could not be attained unless the various faculties with which man was endowed were developed fully in the right direction, and hence a guidance was needed in every sphere of life. The details of law were, therefore, as necessary to make man reach the goal of life as a conviction of the power and majesty of God, but the revelation giving these details could not follow the style and diction of the earlier revelation, nor could its excellence be judged by the same standard.

Dr Steingass has dealt with this point so beautifully that I cannot resist the temptation of giving a somewhat lengthy quotation from him:

> "But if we consider the variety and heterogeneousness of the topics on which the Quran touches, uniformity of style and diction can scarcely be expected; on the contrary, it would appear to be strangely out of place. Let us not forget that in *the* book, as Muhammad's newest biographer Ludolf Krehl (*Das Leben des Muhummed,* Leipzig, 1884), expresses it, 'there is given a complete code of creeds and morals, as well as of the law based thereupon. There are also the foundations laid for every institution of an extensive commonwealth, for instruction, for the administration of justice, for military organization, for the finances, for a most careful legislation for the poor: all built up on the belief in the *one* God, who holds man's destinies in His hand.'
>
> Where so many important objects are concerned, the standard of excellence by which we have to gauge the composition of the Quran as a whole must needs vary with the matter treated upon in each particular case. Sublime and chaste, where the supreme truth of God's unity

is to be proclaimed; appealing in high-pitched strains to the imagination of a poetically gifted people, where the eternal consequences of man's submission to God's holy will, or of rebellion against it, are pictured; touching in its simple, almost crude, earnestness, when it seeks again and again encouragement or consolation for God's messenger and a solemn warning for those to whom he has been sent, in the histories of the prophets of old: the language of the Quran adapts itself to the exigencies of everyday life, when this everyday life, in its private and public bearings, is to be brought into harmony with the fundamental principles of the new dispensation." [18]

[18] Dr F. Steingass, in *A Dictionary of Islam*, by T.P. Hughes, art. 'Quran', pp. 527–528. The quotation from this source given earlier on p. 40, "Here, therefore, its merits as a literary production…", follows immediately after the above quotation.

PART 2 — ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS

2.1: Unity of God

The Unity of the Divine Being is the point on which the greatest stress is laid in the Holy Quran. It is with a declaration of the Unity of God that the Holy Book opens and it is with a declaration of His Unity that it ends. It is the one topic which runs through every page and every line of it. In connection with the Quranic teaching on this point, I will draw attention to three points.

The first point is that the doctrine of Divine Unity was restored to its original purity by the Quran. The Holy Book lays it down that every prophet taught the Unity of God and that this doctrine was the original basis of all religions. The first message of every prophet to his people, according to the Quran, was:

> "My people, serve Allah, you have no god other than Him." [1]

or:

> "… you shall serve none but Allah." [2]

This doctrine is described as the universal teaching of all the prophets:

> "And We sent no messenger before you but We revealed to him that there is no God but Me, so serve Me." — 21:25

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[1] The Quran, 7:59, 7:65, 7:73, 7:85, 11:50, 11:61, 11:84.

[2] The Quran, 11:26, 41:14, 46:21.

Again and again, speaking of polytheism, it asks the upholders of that doctrine, if they have authority sent down to them by God:

> "Or, have they taken gods besides Him? Say: Bring your proof." — 21:24

> "Or have We given them a Book before it so that they hold fast to it?" — 43:21

At the same time it tells us that the doctrine of Unity was mixed up with polytheism by all religions, and to this general corruption it refers in 30:41: "Corruption has appeared in land and sea." Having established that the Unity of God was taught by every prophet who appeared in any part of the world and that polytheistic doctrines were introduced afterwards. into the teachings of the prophets, the Holy Quran invites the followers of all religions to come back to that pure teaching as the basis of an understanding:

> "Say: O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but Allah and that we shall not set up any partner with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah." — 3:64

Now it must be borne in mind that according to the Holy Quran, prophets appeared among all the nations of the world, and, therefore, all the nations are the people of the Book. The verse quoted above, therefore, requires all the nations of the world to come to an understanding by finding out the common element in the different religions, and that common element would form the basis of a religion of humanity. In other words, it lays down that the part which is peculiar to each religion, be it the divinity of Christ or Rama or Krishna or Ahura Mazda, is a later overgrowth, while the part which is common to all, *i.e.* the existence and one-ness of God, is the pure teaching of the prophets. This common element, the Unity of God, was thus in its pristine purity re-established by the Holy Quran.

The second point is that the doctrine of Divine Unity was made perfect by the Holy Quran. Judaism no doubt taught that "You shalt have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image" [3] but the Hindu scriptures do not contain even such an express injunction, while Christianity had little to add to the Jewish doctrine. It was the Holy Quran that cast full light on the doctrine of Divine Unity. It is in one of the earliest chapters that the doctrine of Divine Unity finds the clearest expression in four short sentences:

> "Say, He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on Whom all depend. He has no offspring, nor is He born (of anyone); and none is like Him." — ch. 112

These four short sentences negative the four kinds of polytheism that prevailed in the world before Islam:

1. a belief in the plurality of gods or the plurality of persons in Godhead,
2. a belief that other things possess the perfect attributes of the Divine Being,
3. a belief that anyone may be specially related to Him as son or father,
4. a belief that others may do what is ascribable only to the Divine Being.

Again, the Holy Quran condemns the worship of great and learned men, a disease to which otherwise monotheistic nations were prone:

> "They take their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah…" — 9:31

Here both the Jews and the Christians are spoken of. Thus saint-worship and the worship of learned men was also declared to be opposed to pure monotheism. Undue reverence for great men is

[3] Exodus, 20:3–4.

also condemned here, for the Holy Prophet, in reference to this verse, explained that the Jews and the Christians were spoken of as taking their learned men as lords because they blindly followed whatever they told them: "They did not worship them, but when they made something lawful for them, they considered it lawful, and when they made something unlawful for them, they considered it unlawful." [4]

Again, most people who do not appear to bow before images, or worship other false gods or fellow-men, do bow down before the image of self, their own desires — that greatest of demi-gods. Hence to bring the doctrine of Divine Unity to perfection, the Holy Quran condemned this phase of polytheism in equally strong terms:

> "Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god?" — 25:43 and 45:23

The third important point in connection with the doctrine of Divine Unity as taught in the Holy Quran is that it does not there remain a mere religious dogma. Instead, it is taught as a principle of action to be carried into practice, and is made the basis of the advancement of humanity to a higher goal. In fact, *īmān* (belief) according to the Holy Quran is not simply a conviction of the truth of a given proposition; it is essentially the acceptance to a proposition as a basis for action. "Those who believe and do good" is the ever-recurring description of the believers and, in making belief and actions so closely related to each other, the Quran has shown that no belief is acceptable unless it is carried into practice. It is for this reason that even the believers are asked to believe:

> "O you who believe, believe in Allah and His Messenger…" — 4:136
>
> "O you who believe, keep your duty to Allah and believe in His Messenger." — 57:28

[4] Tirmidhi, book 47: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 10, hadith 3095.

A belief in any doctrine is meaningless unless that belief is made the basis of an action and this is what is meant by calling upon the believers to believe. Such is also the belief in the Unity of God. The idea that man shall not bow before others than God because the Lord God is a jealous God finds no place in the Quran. Nay, *shirk* (associating gods with God) is condemned because it demoralizes man, and Divine Unity is taught because it brings about the moral elevation of man. Belief in Divine Unity does not in any way add to the glory of God, nor does *shirk* detract from it in the least. Man is described in the Holy Quran as *khalīfah* or vicegerent of God, to show that he is gifted with the power of controlling the rest of creation (2:30). He is thus placed above the whole of creation, even above the angels, who make obeisance to him (2:34). He is told expressly that he has been made to rule the world:

> "Allah is He Who made subservient to you the sea that the ships may glide in it by His command, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks. And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all from Himself. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect." — 45:12–13

If, then, man has been created to rule the universe, and he is gifted with the power and capabilities to subdue everything and to turn it to his use, does he not degrade himself by taking other things for gods, by bowing before the elements of nature which he has been created to conquer and rule? This is the view of Divine Unity which the Holy Quran expressly puts forth. It denounces *shirk* because *shirk* degrades man and makes him unfit for the high place for which he has been created. It is full of statements like the following:

> "If you set up partners (with Allah), your work would surely come to nothing and you would be a loser." — 39:65

> "And whoever sets up a partner with Allah, he indeed goes far astray." — 4:116

Man's high place in creation is clearly advanced in many places as an argument against *shirk.* Thus the words in 6:164:

> "Say: Shall I seek a Lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things?"

are followed in the next verse by the argument:

> "And He has made you successors in the land (or rulers of the earth)." — 6:165

Again it says:

> "Shall I seek for you a god other than Allah, while He has made you excel (all) created things?" — 7: 140

The argument is too clear to need explanation. Man is endowed with faculties and powers which can make him excel all creation; if he stoops before the very things which are made subservient to him, he makes himself unfit for attaining the high position which is meant for him in the Divine scheme.

Thus, in its message of Divine Unity, Islam opens out before man a vast field of advancement. It tells him that he is gifted with vast capabilities and that he occupies the highest position in this world. If, however, he occupies such a high position, if he is the vicegerent of God on earth, if he can rise to the highest place in creation, may not the man who has actually attained to that high dignity, the super-man, be taken for an object of worship? The Holy Quran tells us that even that would lower the dignity of man. The super-man to whom was revealed this message of the dignity of man was told to add to the ennobling message of the doctrine of Divine Unity, so beautifully and yet so succinctly summed up in the four words *lā ilāha ill-Allāh,* another equally ennobling message, that the greatest of men, Muhammad (may peace and the blessings of God be upon him) was only a servant of God like all

other men, a mortal in no way differing from them except that he was the bearer of that wonderful message to humanity — *Muhammad-un Rasūl Ullāh:*

> "Say: I am only a mortal like you — it is revealed to me that your God is one God. So whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and make no one a partner (with God) in the service of his Lord." — 18:110

Thus, from the doctrine of Divine Unity, springs the equally important doctrine that all men are alike, or the doctrine of the unity of the human race. Man was freed not only from the slavery of nature to which he had hitherto been subject but from a still greater slavery, the slavery of man. The bonds were cut which enslaved the mind of man, and he was set on the road to progress. A slave mind, as the Holy Quran says plainly, is incapable of doing anything good and great (16:75–76); hence the first condition for the advancement of man was that his mind should be set free from the trammels of slavery, and this was accomplished by the Holy Quran in its message of Divine Unity.

The doctrine of Divine Unity as preached by the Quran may now briefly be stated as follows: that there is the Supreme Being, Creator, and Lord of all, Who alone is to be worshipped and from Whom alone help is to be sought; that man is endowed with vast capabilities so that he can conquer and subjugate the forces of nature and make them serve his purpose, and that all men are equal. To carry these principles into practice, the Muslims are enjoined, on the one hand, to pray to God and, on the other, to reflect on His creation:

> "In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, there are surely signs for those who have understanding, those who remember Allah, standing and sitting and (lying) on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth." — 3:190–191

The wise ones are here described as possessing two characteristics: they remember God and they reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. Reflection on things clearly stands for scientific pursuits, for science is nothing but knowledge gained by systematic observation, experiment, and reasoning, and it is to this that the Holy Quran calls attention when it points out that the right course of those endowed with understanding is that they should observe all that has been created, whether it is on the earth or in the heavens, and ponder over it. To men of understanding it thus recommends the remembrance of God with the pursuit of sciences, combining moral greatness with material advancement, spirituality with science.

Hence it was that Islam gave an impetus to learning and science which is not met with in the history of any other religion. In the history of Christianity, for instance, we find that it started with monasticism and asceticism as the way to perfection. Yet what a strange contrast it is that it has ended in the grossest materialism. There was a time in the history of Christianity when the pursuit of science was considered to be the greatest of crimes, but now Christendom is so engrossed in the world and its pursuits that no room has been left for God. The Quran adheres to the middle course and, in consonance with its interpretation of the doctrine of Divine Unity, requires the conquest of nature along with submission to God.

Remembrance of God or prayer to Him is, according to the Quran, the means to moral perfection, while reflection on His creation leads to material advancement, and the two are closely related. Man could not conquer nature unless he ceased to bow before it, unless his mind was freed from servility to things lower than himself; but with his conquest of nature came his material advancement and, to keep the balance even, it was necessary that he should at the same time attain to moral greatness, which could be brought about only by remembrances of God, by the holding of

communion with the Supreme, All-pervading Spirit. The remembrance of God, it should be borne in mind, does not mean the utterance of the name of God on a rosary; it stands for the realization of the Divine within the man, or for the acquirement of the Divine attributes.

The *ṣalāt*, or prayer of Islam, which is another name for *dhikr*, or the remembrance of God, is a means to the same end. It is the way by which communion is sought with God, and the object in view is to drink deep from the fountain of Divine attributes and to imbibe the Divine morals. The pursuit of science and worldly occupations are thus combined with the attainment of spiritual and moral greatness in Islam, both being really different aspects of a belief in Divine Unity, when the principle is brought into practice.

Another practical aspect of the doctrine of Divine Unity, as dealt with in the Holy Quran, is the unity of the human race. "One God" has its parallel in "One Humanity." The idea of the unity of the human race, on which alone depends its advancement to a higher goal of life, was as entirely lost to the world before the Quran as the idea of the Unity of God. How could there be any unity of the human race when each nation considered itself to be the only favoured nation, the only recipient of Divine revelation, to the exclusion of all other nations who were for ever condemned to the wrath of God?

The Holy Quran came with an entirely new message. It revealed a God who was not the God of this or that nation but who was *Rabb al-'ālamīn*, the Lord, the Sustainer and the Nourisher, of all the nations and of all the worlds. The Quran never speaks of the Lord of the Arabs or of the Lord of the Muslims. The God of the Quran is the Lord of the worlds (1:1), the Lord of the heavens and of the earth (37:5), the Lord of the easts and of the wests (70:40). He is the Lord of the Muslims as well as of the non-Muslims, the Lord even of the enemies of the Muslims:

> "I am commanded to do justice between you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds." — 42:15

And again:

> "Say: Do you dispute with us about Allah, and He is our Lord and your Lord, and for us are our deeds and for you your deeds…" — 2: 139

And still again:

> "Say: We believe in what has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One…" — 29:46

No more ennobling message could be given to humanity. Men and nations may differ, even fight, with one another but they had only one Father, one Lord, one God. No nation was the favourite nation, because all were equal recipients of that greatest of Divine favours, the blessing of Divine revelation. As God was One so was humanity one. The grand message of the new revelation was:

> "Mankind is a single nation." — 2:213

> "And people are but a single nation…" — 10:19

The whole of humanity was only one nation. The division into tribes and families did not in any way interfere with this vast brotherhood of humanity:

> O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you." — 49:13

This is the true brotherhood of the human race, and the day when this broad conception of a human nationality and human brotherhood is accepted, petty national jealousies will come to an end, and a new era of peace and progress will dawn upon the world.

2.2: Divine Attributes

The word *Allāh* is used in the Holy Quran as the proper name of the Divine Being. While He is mentioned by a number of other names, every one of which refers to one of His attributes, *Allāh* comprises all the attributes by which He is known. *Allāh* is an underived word, and is not a contraction of *al-ilāh* (the god). It has never been applied to any being except the only true God, nor did the Arabs ever give this name to any of their idols. As a proper name it cannot be translated into any other language nor is an equivalent of it met with in any other language; hence, whatever language the Muslims speak in any part of the world, they all speak of the Supreme Being as Allah. The word *God* in the English language is not a substitute for Allah, but it has been used for the facility of the English reader. The word *Allāh*, occurring 2,799 times, is, of all the names of the Divine Being, the most frequently recurring in the Holy Quran.

Before speaking of the attributes of God mentioned in the Holy Quran, it is necessary to warn the reader against a misconception about the nature of the Divine Being. God is spoken of in the Holy Quran as seeing, hearing, speaking, making, showing mercy, being displeased, loving, being affectionate, etc., but the use of these words is by no means an indication of an anthropomorphic conception of God; for, He is plainly stated to be above all material conceptions:

> "Vision cannot comprehend Him, and He comprehends (all) vision." — 6: 103

He is not only above all material limitations but even above the limitation of metaphor:

"Nothing is like a likeness of Him." — 42:11

Such is the transcendentally pure conception of the Divine Being. Hence the rule is laid down clearly that, though the words in which the acts of God are spoken of, are the same as those in which the acts of man are referred to, yet there is this essential difference in the two cases that the agent or instrument which enables a man to perform a deed is not conceived of in the case of God.

Of the attributes of the Divine Being, the one that occupies the first place in the Holy Quran is *Rabb* which, for want of a proper word, is translated as 'Lord'. The word in Arabic, however, carries a far grander idea than its English rendering. Its significance, according to Raghib's lexicon of the Quran, is the fostering a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion. Hence *Rabb* is the Lord Who not only gives to the whole creation its means of sustenance, but has also preordained for each kind a sphere of capacity and, within that sphere, provided the means by which it continues gradually to attain its goal of perfection. This significance, given by an Arab lexicographer long before the theory of evolution was known, shows that the idea of evolution is present in the first attribute of the Divine Being mentioned in the Holy Quran.

The importance of this attribute among all the others is clear from the fact that it is the first attribute mentioned in the Holy Quran in its present arrangement, occurring in the first verse of the opening chapter after the name Allah; it is the attribute mentioned in the first revelation granted to the Holy Prophet, occurring twice in the first five verses of the 96th chapter; it is the attribute which, after Allah, is mentioned most frequently, occurring 965 times in the Holy Quran; and, lastly, it is the name by which God is most often addressed in prayers.

It may be noted here that the Quran adopts the word *Rabb* instead of the word *ab* (meaning 'father') which was frequently used by Jesus Christ in addressing God, because the significance

carried by the word ab is very limited in comparison with the grand idea contained in the word *Rabb.* Another peculiarity regarding this attribute may be noted here. It is never used absolutely but always as my *Rabb* or our *Rabb* or your *Rabb,* or *Rabb* of the world. The reason is plain. The Nourisher or Sustainer can be spoken of only in relation to something which He nourishes or sustains. He is spoken of repeatedly as the *Rabb* (or Sustainer) of believers as well as of unbelievers, of the Muslims as well as of their opponents, which is a clear evidence of the broadness of the conception of God in Islam.

Next to *Rabb* in importance are the closely-related names *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm,* translated as 'Beneficent' and 'Merciful' respectively. They occur 400 times in the Quran, while the same attribute in verb form — showing of mercy — occurs about 170 times, bringing the total to about 570. No other attribute, with the exception of *Rabb,* is as frequently repeated. These two attributes not only occupy the highest place after *Rabb* with regard to the frequency of their occurrence, but their importance is also indicated by bringing them in immediately after the attribute *Rabb* in the opening chapter, and further by heading with them every chapter of the Holy Quran in the well-known formula *Bismillāh-ir-Raḥmān-ir-Raḥīm.*

Both these words are active participle nouns of different forms from the same root *raḥmah,* which signifies tenderness requiring the exercise of beneficence, and thus comprises the idea of *love* and *mercy*. *Raḥmān* is of the type of *fa'lān* and indicates the greatest preponderance of the quality of mercy, and *Raḥīm* is of the type of *fa'īl* and expresses a constant repetition and manifestation of that quality. The two words are applicable to two different states of the exercise of mercy in God; the first to that state when man has not done anything to deserve it and God exercises His unbounded mercy in bestowing His gifts on him, and the second to that condition when man does something to deserve His mercy, and His mercy is, therefore, repeatedly exercised for him.

Thus it is *Raḥmān* Who creates for man all those things which make his life possible on this earth, and it is *Raḥīm* Who gives him the fruits of his labour; or, again, it is *Raḥmān* Who, by His revelation, shows man the right way to develop his faculties, and it is *Raḥīm* Who rewards the faithful for the good they do.

This distinction is so fine that Church Christianity has been unable to realize it, for it holds that God could not show mercy unless man had done something to deserve it, and hence the necessity for a vicarious atonement. Verses 19:88–92 may be specially noted in this connection where the allegation "the Beneficent God has taken Himself a son" is met with the argument: "And it is not worthy of the Beneficent that He should take to Himself a son", the implication being that the mercy of the Beneficent God (*Raḥmān*) was so unbounded that He could show mercy even to those who had done nothing to deserve it.

It is not only the frequent occurrence of the two names *Rahmān* and *Raḥīm* and the importance attached to them by placing them at the head of each chapter that shows that the quality of mercy is, according to the Holy Quran, the most predominant of all qualities in God. The Holy Book has gone further and laid the greatest stress in explicit words on the immeasurable vastness of Divine mercy. I quote only a few examples:

> "He has ordained mercy on Himself." — 6:12
>
> "Your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself…" — 6:54
>
> "Your Lord is the Lord of all-encompassing mercy." — 6:147
>
> "And My mercy encompasses all things." — 7:156
>
> "In the grace of Allah and in His mercy, in that they should rejoice." — 10:58
>
> "Except those on whom your Lord has mercy, and for this did He create them." — 11:119

> "O My servants who have been reckless against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives sins altogether." — 39:53
>
> Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge …" — 40:7

So great is Divine mercy that it encompasses the believer and the unbeliever alike. Even the opponents of the Prophet are spoken of as having mercy shown to them:

> "And when We make people taste of mercy after an affliction touches them, lo! they devise plans against Our messages." — 10:21

Whenever the polytheists are spoken of as calling upon God in distress, we are told that God removes their distress and has mercy on them. Again, we find it repeatedly stated that the evil done by man is either obliterated or punished only with the like of it, but good is rewarded tenfold, hundredfold, even without measure:

> "Whoever brings good, he will have better than it; and whoever brings evil, those who do evil will be recompensed only for what they did." — 28:84
>
> "Whoever brings a good deed will have tenfold like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, will be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be wronged." — 6:160
>
> "For those who do good is good (reward) and more (than this). … And those who earn evil, the punishment of an evil is the like of it…" — 10:26–27

All this proves that, according to the Holy Quran, mercy is the preponderating attribute of God. In fact, the name *Rabb* (the Giver of sustenance) is also indicative of Divine mercy, for providing for

His creatures, whether they deserve it or not, is due to His unbounded mercy alone.

The next name in point of importance is *Ghafūr* ('Forgiving') so far as the frequency of its occurrence in the Holy Quran is concerned, for, along with the other cognate forms *Ghāfir* and *Ghaffār*, and along with its verb forms indicating the exercise of the attribute of *ghafr*, it occurs 233 times in the Holy Quran. Now 'Forgiving' is again a defective rendering for the original *Ghafūr*, for the Arabic word carries a double significance. The root word *ghafr* means the granting of protection, and *Ghafūr*, therefore, means the *Grantor of protection against sin* or *against the punishment of sin*. 'Forgiving' carries only the latter meaning, and the other significance, which is really the more important, viz., that God is also He Who grants protection to His servants against the commission of sin, is not covered by it.

Another point which must be borne in mind in this connection is that God's attribute of forgiveness towards man is not limited by any consideration; the sins may be few or many and the sinful one may be a Muslim or a non-Muslim; see 39:53 quoted above. In fact, He is spoken of as "the Forgiver of sins and the Accepter of repentance" (40:3), so that He forgives even if there is no repentance. Elsewhere He is described as "Worthy to forgive" (74:56), which is explained as meaning that, even if man is not worthy of being forgiven, yet the quality of forgiveness is exercised towards him because God is worthy to forgive. Such is the vastness of the conception of forgiveness of God as taught by the Holy Quran.

I now wish to draw the reader's attention to one notable point. It will be noticed that the attributes of God which most frequently occur in the Holy Quran are also those which are given in the opening chapter which is looked upon as the quintessence of the Holy Quran, and further that they occur there exactly in the order of their importance. *Allāh*, the proper name occurs 2,799 times and

comes first; *Rabb*, occurring 967 times, comes next; *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm*, occurring over 560 times, follow *Rabb*. However, the fourth attribute mentioned in the opening chapter is not *Ghafūr* or Forgiving, which, after the above three names, occurs most frequently in the Holy Quran; instead of that we have *Mālik* or 'Master' (of the day of requital). The reason is that the name *Mālik* or Master is used here, and not king or judge, which names do occur elsewhere in the Holy Quran, to lay stress on the attribute of forgiveness. A judge, or a king in his capacity as a judge, is bound to do justice, and he cannot forgive the offender, but a master has as much right to forgive as to punish. It is the duty of a judge to hold the balance equally between two parties, and God is a judge no doubt; but He is more than a judge; He is the Master, and the guilty are only His creatures whom He can forgive, to whatever extent He pleases, without any suggestion of injustice or favouritism being attributed to Him.

The first three attributes of the Divine Being as mentioned in the opening chapter are all attributes expressing the unbounded love and mercy of God for His creatures, but the picture drawn there would have been incomplete if it had left out altogether the punishment of the evil-doers. Nevertheless, punishment is referred to in a word in which the preponderating idea is still that of forgiveness and love, for it is a Master's dealing with His servants and creatures, thus showing that, though punishment is necessary, yet in the Divine scheme it is meted out only when the ends of justice would fail altogether without it, and even then it is a remedial measure.

All the other attributes of the Divine Being that are mentioned in the Holy Quran are, as it were, offshoots of any one of the four essential attributes mentioned in the opening chapter. He is:

al-Wāḥid or *Aḥad*, the One

al-Ḥayy, the Ever-Living

al-Qayyūm, the Self-Subsisting

al-Ghanī, the Self-Sufficient

al-Awwal, the First

al-Ākhir, the Last

al-Quddūs, the Holy

al-Ṣamad, on Whom all depend and He depends not on any

al-Ḥaqq, the True

As relating to the act of creation, He is:

al-Khāliq (the Creator), *al-Bārī'* (the Maker or the Creator of soul), *al-Muṣawwir* (the Fashioner of shapes), *al-Badī'* (Wonderful Originator).

In relation to His love and mercy, He is:

al-Ra'ūf (the Affectionate), *al-Wadūd* (Loving-Kind), *al-Laṭīf* (the Benignant), *al-Tawwāb* (the Oft-Returning to mercy), *al-Ḥalīm* (the Forbearing), *al-'Afuww* (the Pardoner), *al-Shakūr* (the Multiplier of rewards), *al-Salām* (the Author of peace), *al-Mu'min* (the Granter of security), *al-Muhaimin* (the Guardian over all), *al-Jabbār* (the Restorer of every loss), *al-Barr* (the Benign), *Rāfi' al-darajāt* (the Exalter of ranks), *al-Wāsi'* (the Ample-Giving), *al-Wahhāb* (the great Giver), *al-Razzāq* (the Bestower of sustenance).

In relation to His glory, power, and greatness, He is:

al-'Aẓīm (the Great), *al-'Azīz* (the Mighty), *al-Qādir* or *Qadīr* or *Muqtadir* (the Powerful), *al-'Aliyy* or *Muta'āl* (the High), *al-Qawiyy* (the Strong), *al-Qahhār* (the Supreme), *al-Mutakabbir* (the Possessor of every greatness), *al-Kabīr* (the Great), *al-Karīm* (the Honoured), *al-Ḥamīd* (the Praiseworthy), *al-Majīd* (the Glorious), *al-Matīn* (the Strong), *al-Ẓāhir* (the Ascendant over all), *Dhul-Jalāl wal Ikrām* (the Lord of glory and honour).

In relation to His knowledge, He is:

> *al-ʻAlīm* (the Knowing), *al-Ḥakīm* (the Wise), *al-Samīʻ* (the Hearing), *al-Kẖabīr* (the Aware), *al-Baṣīr* (the Seeing), *al-Sẖahīd* (the Witness), *al-Raqīb* (the Watcher), *al-Bāṭin* (the Knower of hidden things).

In relation to His control of things, He is:

> *al-Wakīl* (having all things in His charge), *al-Waliyy* (the Guardian), *al-Ḥafīẓ* (the Keeper), *al-Malik* (the King), *al-Mālik* (the Master), *al-Fattāḥ* (the greatest Judge), *al-Ḥasīb* or *Ḥāsib* (One who takes account), *al-Muntaqim* or *Dẖu-Intiqām* (the Inflictor of retribution), *al-Muqīt* (the Controller of all things).

2.3: Life after death

I am dealing with this subject here for two reasons. In the first place, because there are many misunderstandings about it, and secondly, because it is in the Holy Quran that full light is cast on this subject and no other sacred Book makes any approach to the wonderful disclosures made in the Quran.

Death a stage in Evolution

According to the Holy Quran, death does not bring the life of man to an end; it only opens the door to a higher form of life. Just as from dust is evolved a human, from the deeds which he does is evolved the higher human. Hence we find the Holy Quran again and again referring to his creation from a very low origin, when speaking of life after death:

> "We have created you, why do you not then accept (the truth)? Do you see (the semen) which you emit? Is it you that create it, or are We the Creator? We have ordained death among you and We are not to be overcome, that We may change your state and make you grow into what you do not know." — 56:57–61

As from the small life-germ grows up the man and he does not lose his individuality for all the changes which he undergoes, so from this man is made the higher man, his attributes being changed and he being made to grow into what he cannot conceive at present.

Man's life in this world is not without an aim, and the aim is to attain to a higher life:

> "Does man think that he will be left aimless? Was he not a small life-germ in sperm emitted? Then he was a clot; so He created (him), then made (him) perfect. Then He made of him two kinds, the male and the female. Is not He Powerful to give life to the dead?" — 75:36–40

The life after death is, therefore, one of the fundamentals of Islam, but not as a dogma.

Connection between the two lives

The life after death, according to the Holy Quran, opens out a wide vista of progress before man, a new world of advancement before which the progress of this life sinks into insignificance:

> "And certainly the Hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in excellence." — 17:21

The connection between the two lives, the life on this earth and the life after death, is established in the clearest words. Heaven and hell are not places of enjoyment and torture to be met with only after death; they are realities even here. The Hereafter is not a mystery beyond the grave; it begins in this very life. For the good, the heavenly life, and for the wicked, a life in hell, begins even here:

1. "And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens." — 55:46

The two Gardens are a garden in this life and a garden in the Hereafter. The garden of this life is the spiritual bliss which the righteous find here in the doing of good, of which gardens and rivers and fruits are symbols.

2. "O soul that are at rest, return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him). So enter among My servants, and enter My Garden!" — 89:27–30

This refer to the highest stage of the spiritual development of man, the stage in which he *rests contented* with his Lord. His efforts are rewarded by Almighty God by granting him a heaven on this earth. He then returns to his Lord to enter the Garden of the afterlife.

3. "It is the Fire kindled by Allah, which rises above the hearts." — 104:6–7

It is within the heart of a human being that the origin of hell-fire lies. A man's hell is thus within his own heart in this life.

4. "And whoever is blind in this (world), he will be blind in the Hereafter…" — 17:72

Those who remain blind to truth in this life remain blind in the life after death, showing that it is here that a hellish life begins with spiritual blindness, which manifests itself as blindness in the next life.

The Resurrection or the Hour

While the life after death is spoken of as a continuation of this life, a particular day is repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Quran, under various names, as the day on which that life finds a complete manifestation. It is generally called *yaum al-qiyāmah* or the day of the great rising or the Resurrection (2:113, 75:1), and is also spoken of as follows:

yaum al-faṣl	the day of Decision (77:13)
yaum al-ḥisāb	the day of Reckoning (38:26)
yaum al-fatḥ	the day of Judgment (51:12)
yaum al-talāq	the day of Meeting (with God) (40:15)
yaum al-jam'	the day of the Gathering together (42:7)
yaum al-khulūd	the day of Abiding (50:34)
yaum al-khurūj	the day of Coming Forth (50:42)
yaum al-taghābun	the day of the manifestation of losses (64:9)
yaum al-dīn	the day of Requital (1:3)

The most frequently occurring word for the Resurrection is *al-Sā'ah*, which originally means *any portion of time*, and is, therefore, generally rendered as *the Hour*. Raghib, the well-known lexicographer of the Quran, says that there are three *sā'ahs* (hours) in the sense of resurrection:

1. *kubrā* (or *the greater*), which is the rising up of the people for reckoning;

2. *wusṭā* (or *the middle*), which is the passing away of a nation; and

3. *ṣughrā* (or *the minor*), which is the death of the individual.

The word is used in all these senses in the Holy Quran. An example of the last occurs in 6:31: "They are losers indeed who reject the meeting with Allah, until when the hour comes upon them suddenly," where *the hour* clearly stands for the death of the person who gives the lie.

As regards the use of the word in the other two senses, it is very frequent, and the two significances are often interchangeable, either sense being applicable. For instance, take 7:182–187, where the doom of the opponents is first clearly spoken of:

> "And those who reject Our messages — We lead them (to destruction) step by step from where they do not know." — 7:182

> "…it may be that their doom has drawn near…" — 7:185

and then immediately the hour is spoken of:

> "They ask you about the Hour, when will it take place?" — 7:187

This sequence makes it clear that the *hour* here is primarily the *doom* of the opponents with which they were being threatened. Again, take the 54th chapter, which opens thus: "The hour drew near and the moon was split apart." The hour in this case stands for the doom of the Prophet's opponents, for the splitting apart of the moon was a miracle of the Holy Prophet which signified the doom of the Quraish, the moon being an emblem of their power. The same word, *al- Sā'ah*, occurs twice again in the concluding section of the chapter, and in both places stands for the doom of the opponents:

> "Or do they say: We are an army allied together to help each other? Soon shall the armies be routed, and they will show (their) backs. Indeed, the Hour is their promised time, and the Hour is most grievous and bitter. — 54:44-46

Bukhari tells us, in his comment on these verses, that when the Holy Prophet was faced with a most serious situation on the day of Badr, the Muslims being in danger of being annihilated by their powerful opponents, and he was praying for their safety, he was reminded of the prophecy contained here and comforted his companions by reciting these verses aloud,[1] showing that by the *hour* here was meant the hour of the enemy's discomfiture, which is called the "the touch of hell" in 54:48. This shows that the Quran speaks clearly of reward and punishment being awarded in this life as well. In other words, it does not ignore this life and relegate everything to the hereafter.

Resurrection in this life

The different words which stand for the Resurrection are in some sense also applicable to this life. The rising of the dead is sometimes their spiritual resurrection which was to be brought about by the preaching of the Holy Prophet. *The day of Decision* also signifies the triumph of Truth and the vanquishment of falsehood, *the day of Reckoning* is equally the reckoning in this life, and so is *the day of Requital, the day of Gathering Together* is also the day of the gathering together of the opposing forces of Truth and falsehood, and so on.

The law of the requital of good and evil affects this life as much as the next, a complete manifestation taking place when the limitations of the body of clay are removed by death, which thus becomes a starting-point for a new and higher life. It is a law that works every moment and will not come into operation on a

[1] Bukhari, book 65: 'Commentary on the Quran', *Sūrah* 54, ch. 6, hadith 4875.

particular day; even paradise and hell are spoken of as originating with this life. Hence God is repeatedly described as *Quick in Reckoning*,[2] meaning that His reckoning is working every moment. Every evil deed leaves its impress on the human mind:

> "No, rather, what they earned is rust upon their hearts." — 83:14

so that the consequence follows as soon as a deed is done. Still more plainly:

> "And We have made every human being's actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open." — 17:13

Thus an action leaves its effect upon man as soon as it is done; only it is not seen by the human eye, but will be palpably manifest in the form of a wide-open book on the day of Resurrection, for the veil which covers the eye now, so that it cannot see the finer things, shall then be removed:

> "You were indeed heedless of this, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight is sharp this day." — 50:22

The law of the requital of good and evil is thus working all the time; only the consequences cannot be seen by the physical eye, but the finer senses granted at the Resurrection will see them clearly: "On the day when hidden things are manifested" (86:9).

The Balance

The law of the requital of good and evil is a comprehensive one:

> "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it." — 99:7–8

[2] 2:202, 3:19, 3:199, etc.

So every good deed bears fruit, and every evil deed bears an evil consequence, whether the doer is a Muslim or a non-Muslim; but, owing to the preponderance of mercy in Divine nature, good brings tenfold fruit, even seven hundredfold. See the verses quoted earlier,[3] to which the following may be added:

> "The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies (further) for whom He pleases. And Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing." — 2:261

> "And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have earned and He pardons much." — 42:30

A human being is judged by the preponderance of good or evil in him and it is in this connection that the setting up of a *mīzān,* "balance" or "measure", is spoken of. The words *wazn* and *mīzān*, as used in the Holy Quran in this connection, do not indicate weighing with a pair of scales; it is in the wider sense of fulfilling the requirements of justice that they are used. For instance:

> "Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the *mīzān* (balance or measure), that people may conduct themselves with equity." — 57:25

This speaks of messengers being sent with the Book and the *mīzān,* where the *mīzān* clearly stands for rules of justice or principles of equity, as made further clear in the words "that people may conduct themselves with equity". Again, 55:7 speaks of a *mīzān* being set up in nature: "And the heaven, He raised it high, and He set up the *mīzān*". Here the *mīzān* stands for justice, according to well-known commentators. A similar measure or balance is

[3] 28:84, 6:160, and 10:26–27 on p. 61.

spoken of as being set up to judge man, whether it is good that preponderates in him or evil. Here are a few quotations:

> "And We will set up a just balance on the day of Resurrection, so no soul will be wronged in the least. And if there were the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it. And Sufficient are We to take account." — 21:47

> "And the judging on that day will be just; so as for those whose good deeds are heavy, they are the successful. And as for those whose good deeds are light, those are they who ruined their souls…" — 7:8–9

The book of deeds

A few words may be added as to *the book of deeds*. We are told that every action, however great or small, is written down:

> "And the book (*kitāb*) is placed, and you see the guilty fearing for what is in it, and they say: O woe to us! What a book is this! It leaves out neither a small thing, nor a great one, but numbers them all…" — 18:49

> "So whoever does good deeds and is a believer, there is no rejection of his effort, and We surely write it down for him" (21:94).

> "…he utters not a word but there is by him a watcher at hand." — 50:18

> "Or do they think that We do not hear their secrets and their private counsels? Yes indeed, and Our messengers with them write down." — 43:80

> "And surely there are keepers over you, honourable recorders, they know what you do." — 82:10–12

> "This is Our record (*kitāb*) that speaks against you with truth. Surely We wrote what you did." — 45:29

Not only has every individual his book of deeds, but even nations are spoken of as having their books of deeds:

> "And you will see every nation kneeling down. Every nation will be called to its record (*kitāb*). This day you are requited for what you did." — 45:28

It must, however, be borne in mind that the word *kitāb* (translated as 'book' or 'record') or *kataba* ('he wrote') is used in a very wide sense in the Holy Quran. As Raghib says, *kitāb* does not always mean a collection of written leaves; it sometimes signifies *the knowledge of God*, or *His command*, or *what He has made obligatory*. Nor does *kataba* always signify that he wrote certain words on paper with ink and pen; it also means *he made a thing obligatory*, or *decreed, ordained*, or *prescribed a thing*. Let us see now what is meant by the writing of the deeds and the book of deeds. The above quotations show that by the writing of the deeds is meant their preserving and guarding, the angels being called both *keepers* and *recorders*. The following verses throw additional light on this subject:

> "And We have made every human being's actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read your book. Your own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day." — 17:13–14

> "For him are (angels) guarding the consequences (of his deeds), before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah's command." — 13:11

> "No, surely the record of the wicked is in the prison. And what will make you know what the prison is? It is a written book." — 83:7–9

> "No, surely the record of the righteous is in the highest places. And what will make you know what the highest places are? It is a written book." — 83:18–20

The first of these quotations shows that the book of deeds which a human being will find on the day of Resurrection is nothing but the effect of the deeds he has done. In the second, it is not what a person does that is spoken of as being guarded, but it is clearly the doer who is guarded, and, reading it with the first quotation, the conclusion is evident that man's deeds are guarded by the impress which they make upon him. The third and the fourth quotations show that the book or record of deeds is identical with the place where it is kept; in the former, the book of deeds is in a prison and the prison is a written book; in the latter, the book of deeds is in the highest places and the highest places are a written book. The book of deeds is, therefore, within man because the deeds are preserved by the effect which they leave on man. It is said to be in a prison, in one case, because the evil deeds hamper a man's progress, and keep his faculties for the doing of great and good deeds shut up, as it were, within a prison; and, in the other case, it is said to be in the highest places, because by good deeds the faculties given to man find their highest development.

It is quite in consonance with this that we are told that a person himself will make his own account:

> "Read your book. Your own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day." — 17:14

It is sometimes the doer that reads his own book, while on another occasion he invites others to read the same:

> "Here, Read my book." — 69:19

Such is the doer of good, while the evildoer is made to say:

> "If only my book had not been given to me! And I had not known what my account was!" — 69:25–26

That each nation has also a book, as already pointed out, bears out the truth of what has been said here, for the impress of what a people do is equally left on their national life, and nations like individuals are judged by what they do.

Paradise

The life after death takes two forms: a life in paradise for those in whom the good preponderates over the evil, and a life in hell for those in whom the evil preponderates over the good. The word *paradise* (Ar. *firdaus*) occurs only twice in the Holy Quran — in 18:107 and 23:11. It is the word *Jannah* (Garden) or its plural *Jannāh* that is generally used to indicate the abiding-place of the righteous. They are generally described as those who believe and do good deeds, while their abiding-place is generally said to be Gardens in which rivers flow. The rivers correspond to faith, and the trees of the Garden corresponding to the good which a human being does.

In this connection, note the following verses:

> "And those who believe and do good are made to enter Gardens, in which rivers flow, abiding in them by their Lord's permission. Their greeting therein is, Peace! Do you not see how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word as a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are high,…" — 14:23–24

A good word is like a good tree which gives its fruit in every season, and therefore the fruits which a person will find in paradise are only the fruits of his own good deeds. The trees of paradise are in fact a person's own good deeds, which have grown into trees. As good deeds are likened to fruit-bearing trees, faith is likened to water repeatedly in the Holy Quran, being the source of physical life.[4]

[4] *Editor's Note:* Maulana Muhammad Ali has also given an alternative interpretation in a footnote under 2:24 in his English translation of the Quran. He writes: "Elsewhere, the pure word of faith is compared to a tree which gives its fruit in all seasons (14:24). Belief is thus like a seed cast into the ground, growing into a tree and bearing fruit when properly nurtured. The rivers represent the good deeds which are necessary to the growth of the seed. … The righteous are spoken of as having gardens in the next life to show that they have made the seed of faith to grow into extensive gardens."

The word *Jannah* is derived from *jann*, which means *to conceal a thing so that it is not perceived by the senses*, and *jannah* means *a garden* because its ground is covered by trees. The description of paradise as a garden with rivers flowing in it is, however, only a parable:

> "A parable of the Garden which the dutiful are promised: In it are rivers of water…" — 47:15

The blessings of paradise cannot be conceived in this life, and are not, therefore, things of this world:

> "So no soul knows what joy of the eyes is hidden for them: a reward for what they did." — 32:17

An explanation of these words by the Holy Prophet is given in Bukhari as follows:

> "Allah says: I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what the mind of man has not conceived." [5]

Therefore paradise and what it contains cannot even be conceived by the mind of man. Ibn Abbas is reported to have said that "nothing that is in paradise resembles anything that is in this world except in name".[6] For instance, the word *ẓill* (lit., *shade*) occurs very often in the Holy Quran in connection with the blessings of paradise, but a shade is not what is really meant, for there is no sun:

> "…they will see therein neither (excessive heat of) sun, nor intense cold." — 76:13

The word is there, but the significance underlying it is different. According to Raghib, it stands for *plenty* or *protection*. Such is

[5] Bukhari, book 59: Beginning of Creation, ch. 8, hadith 3244.

[6] *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* by Mahmud al-Alusi, vol. 1, p. 172.

also *rizq* (*sustenance*) in paradise; it cannot be what sustains the body here; in fact, prayer itself is called a sustenance:

> "And the sustenance of your Lord is better and more lasting. And enjoin prayer on your people, and steadily adhere to it. We do not ask from you a sustenance. We provide for you." — 20:131–132.

Nor are the fruits of paradise like the fruits of this life, because these are the fruits of deeds done:

> "Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit of these (Gardens), they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it." — 2:25

Evidently the fruits of deeds are meant here, and not the fruits that the earth grows, because the latter are not given to all the faithful here, while the former are. Similar is the case with the water, the milk, the honey, the cushions, the thrones, the clothes and the adornments of the next life. They are not things of this life. These descriptions are of the nature of similes as the Quran expressly calls them a *ma<u>th</u>al* — simile or parable.

In fact, a little consideration would show that even our ideas of place and time are not applicable to the next life. It is said in the Quran that paradise extends over the whole of the heavens and the earth:

> "And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden, as wide as the heavens and the earth." — 3:133; see also 57:21

and when the Prophet was asked where hell was, if paradise extends over the whole of the heavens and the earth, he replied: "Where is the night when the day comes?" [7] This shows clearly that paradise and hell are more like two conditions than two places.

[7] *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 1, p. 670.

Again, despite the fact that the two are poles asunder, the one being the highest of the high and the other the lowest of the low, they are separated only by a wall:

> "Then a wall, with a door in it, will be raised between them. Within it shall be mercy, and outside of it punishment." — 57:13

Elsewhere, speaking of the inmates of paradise and the inmates of hell, it says: "And between them is a veil" (7:46). Again, a vehement "raging and roaring" of hell-fire is mentioned repeatedly (25:12; 67:7), but those in paradise "will not hear the faintest sound of it" (21:102), while we are told that those in hell shall talk with those in heaven and the two shall hear each other; see 7:44–50. I quote only the concluding verse:

> "And the companions of the Fire call out to the owners of the Garden: Pour on us some water or some of what Allah has provided for you. They say: Surely Allah has forbidden them both to the disbelievers." — 7:50

Thus those in paradise shall hear the talk of those in hell, but they shall not hear the roaring of the fire of hell. This shows that hell is a condition which shall be perceived only by those in it, and similar is the case with paradise.

Paradise and Hell begin in this life

As I have already pointed out, the Holy Quran says that paradise and hell begin in this very life. Read the following verses along with those already quoted:

> "And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit of these (Gardens), they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it." — 2:25

> "For them is a known sustenance…" — 37:41

> "And He will make them enter the Garden, which He has made known to them." — 47:6

The first of these verses shows that the fruits which the righteous shall find in paradise shall be the same as were given to them in this life. The second and the third show that the sustenance which shall be given to them in paradise is made known to them in this very life. It is clear that the sustenance and the fruits spoken of here are not those which the righteous have in common with the evildoers, the fruits and the sustenance that the earth grows, which is needed for the support of the body of both. The things meant are those which are granted specially to the righteous, to which the evildoers have no access; in fact, they remain quite blind to them in this life and are, therefore, deprived of them in the Hereafter:

> "And whoever is blind in this (world) he will (also) be blind in the Hereafter…" — 17:72

These are the fruits of good deeds and the sustenance which the righteous find in the remembrance of God:

> "So bear patiently what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and glorify (Him) during the hours of the night and parts of the day, that you may be well pleased. And do not strain your eyes (with desire) at what We have provided different classes of them with — the splendour of this world's life — that We may try them by means of it. And the sustenance of your Lord is better and more lasting." — 20:130–131

It is in accordance with this that the soul that has found rest in God is admitted to paradise in this life:

> "O soul that art at rest, return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him). So enter among My servants, and enter My Garden!" — 89:27–30

Highest bliss of Paradise

It is quite in accordance with this conclusion that we find that the highest bliss of paradise is plainly stated to be the pleasure of God, the greatest spiritual blessing which the righteous strive for in this life, and by attaining which they enter into paradise in this very life, as has just been shown:

> "Allah has promised to the believers, men and women, Gardens in which flow rivers, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of perpetual abode. And greatest of all is Allah's goodly pleasure. That is the mighty achievement." — 9:72

Those in paradise shall be occupied with and find delight in the praise of God and in His glorification; in what has been declared in 20:131 (i.e., "celebrate the praise of your Lord") to be a spiritual sustenance for the righteous in this life. We are told:

> "Their cry therein will be, Glory be to You, O Allah! and their greeting, Peace! And the last of their cry will be: Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!" — 10:10

There is no grief, fatigue or toil therein, and the heart is purified of all rancour and jealousy, peace and security reigning on all sides:

> "Surely those who keep their duty are in Gardens and fountains. Enter them in peace, secure. And We shall remove whatever of bitterness is in their hearts — as brothers, on thrones, facing each other. Toil does not afflict them therein, nor will they be ejected from there." — 15:45–48

> "They hear therein no idle or sinful talk — but only the saying, Peace! Peace!"— 56:25–26

> "And they say: Praise be to Allah, Who has removed grief from us! Surely our Lord is Forgiving, Multiplier of reward, Who out of His grace has settled us in a house

> abiding forever; therein toil does not touch us nor does fatigue afflict us therein." — 35:34–35

Paradise is meant for further advancement

Despite all this, paradise, according to the Holy Quran, is not a place for simple enjoyment or rest. It is essentially a place for advancement to higher and higher stages:

> "But those who keep their duty to their Lord, for them are high places, above which are yet higher places, built (for them)…" — 39:20

This shows that not only does paradise admit the righteous to high places, but it is, in fact, the starting-point for a new advancement, there being higher and higher places still, and it is in accordance with this that they are spoken of as having an unceasing desire for attaining to higher and higher excellences, their prayer in paradise being:

> "Our Lord, make perfect for us our light…" — 66:8

This idea of a ceaseless advancement in paradise is one which is peculiar to the Holy Quran, and not the least trace of it is to be met with in any other scripture.

Hell is meant for purification

Quite in accordance with the idea of paradise as a place of unending progress to higher stages of life is the idea of hell, where punishment is not meant for torture but for purification, in order to make a human fit for spiritual advancement. The idea underlying hell is that those who wasted their opportunity in this life shall, under the inevitable law which makes everyone taste of what he has done, be subjected to a course of treatment for the spiritual diseases which they have brought about with their own hands. It is for this reason that the Holy Quran makes a difference between the abiding in paradise and the abiding in hell, allowing a termination in the case of hell but not in the case of paradise.

As I have already noted, punishment for evil deeds sometimes takes effect in this very life, and the Holy Quran lays down the principle in clear words that every such punishment is a remedial measure:

> "And We did not send a prophet to a town but We seized its people with distress and affliction that they might humble themselves." — 7:94

> "And indeed We sent (messengers) to nations before you, then We seized them with distress and affliction that they might humble themselves." — 6:42

It is clear from this that God brings down His punishment upon a sinning people in order that they may turn to Him; in other words, that they may be awakened to the higher life. The same must, therefore, be the object of the punishment in hell. That this is really so is made clear, in the first place, by giving the utmost prominence to the quality of mercy in God, as already pointed out, and then by stating clearly that all human beings have been created for mercy:

> "… except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them." — 11:119

The purpose of God must be ultimately fulfilled and, though man may bring down punishment on himself by his deeds, yet as God has created him for mercy, mercy is the ultimate end in the Divine scheme. Elsewhere we are told:

> "And I have not created the jinn and the people except that they should serve Me." — 51:56

They must, therefore, ultimately be made fit for the service of God, and that is the higher life. With all its fearfulness, hell is called a *maulā* (*patron*) of the sinners, in one place,[8a] and their *umm* (*mother*), in another.[8b] Both these descriptions of hell are a clear

[8a] 57:15. [8b] 101:9.

indication that hell is meant only to purify a person of the dross which he has accumulated with his own hands, just as fire purifies gold of dross.

In fact, it is to point to this truth that the Holy Quran uses the word *fitnah* (which originally means *the assaying of gold*, or *casting it into fire to purify it of dross*), both of the persecutions which the faithful are made to suffer[9a] and of the punishment which the evildoers shall suffer in hell.[9b] In the last-mentioned verse the food which those in hell shall be given is called *fitnah*. The object in both cases is the same: the faithful are purified through persecutions and the evildoers by hell-fire. Therefore hell is called a *patron* of the sinners, because, through suffering, it will make them fit for spiritual progress; and it is called a *mother* of the sinners to show that its connection with them is that of a mother with her child, the sinners being brought up, as it were, in the bosom of hell. The fire is a source of torment, but it is also a purifier. The keenness of the torments of the other life is due to the keener perception of the soul, which is the necessary result of its separation from the earthly vessel. Bliss and torment, therefore, grow equally keener in that life.

Punishment of hell not everlasting

It is in consonance with its remedial nature that we find it stated that the sinners shall ultimately be taken out of hell. It is true that the word *abad* is used three times in the Holy Quran in connection with the abiding in hell,[10a] but *abad* indicates *eternity* as well as *long time*. It is the latter significance which must be taken in this case since this is made clear by the use, in the same connection, of the word *aḥqāb*,[10b] meaning *years* or *long years*. Besides this, a limitation is placed on the abiding in hell by the addition of the words *except as your Lord please*, the exception clearly indicating

[9a] 2:191, 29:2, 29:10.

[9b] 37:63.

[10a] 4:169; 33:65; 72:23.

[10b] 78:23.

the ultimate deliverance of those in hell. The following two verses may be noted in this connection:

> "He will say: The Fire is your abode — you shall abide in it, except as Allah please. Surely your Lord is Wise, Knowing." — 6:128

> "Then as for those who are unhappy, they will be in the Fire; for them there will be in it sighing and groaning — abiding in it so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please. Surely your Lord is Doer of what He intends." — 11:106–107

Both these verses show clearly that the punishment of hell is not everlasting. To make this conclusion clearer still, the second reference quoted above may be compared with what follows it in the next verse, which describes the abiding in paradise:

> "And as for those who are made happy, they will be in the Garden, abiding in it so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please — a gift never to be cut off." — 11:108

The two expressions are similar: those in hell and those in paradise abide in it "so long as the heavens and the earth endure". Then an exception added which is the same in each case ("except as your Lord please"), showing that they may be taken out of it. The statements following the exception are, however, different. In the case of paradise, the idea that those in it may be taken out of it, if God pleases, is immediately followed by the statement that it is a gift which shall never be cut off, showing that they shall *never* be taken out of paradise. However, in the case of hell, the idea of those in it being taken out of it is *confirmed* by the concluding statement — "Surely your Lord is Doer of what He intends".

The conclusion drawn above is corroborated by the sayings of the Holy Prophet. Thus a saying reported in the *Muslim* concludes:

> "Then Allah will say: The angels have interceded and the prophets have interceded and the faithful have interceded and none remains but the most Merciful of all merciful ones. So He will take out a handful from the fire and bring out a people who have never done any good." [11]

Further, Bukhari records a saying to the effect that, when the sinners are taken out from hell, they shall be thrown into:

> "the river of life, and they will grow as grows a seed by the side of a river." [12]

This clearly indicates that they shall be made fit for a higher life. The *Kanz al-'Ummāl* records the following:

> "Surely a day will come over hell when it will be like a field of corn that has dried up, after flourishing for a while."
>
> "Surely a day will come over hell when there shall not be a single human being in it." [13]

A saying of Umar is recorded as follows:

> "Even if the dwellers in hell may be numberless as the sands of the desert, a day will come when they will be taken out of it." [14]

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[11] Sahih Muslim, book 1: Faith, ch. 81, hadith 183a.

[12] Bukhari, book 2: Faith, ch. 15, hadith 22.

[13] *Kanz al-'Ummāl,* vol. 7, p. 245.

[14] *Fatḥ al-Bayān fī maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* by Siddiq ibn Hasan ibn Ali al-Bukhari, under 11:107, vol. 6, p. 254. In the online version of the same print edition see the link: https://al-maktaba.org/book/32265/3724#p1

2.4: Revelation and prophethood

Types of revelation

Revelation, according to the Holy Quran, is universal. Five kinds of revelation are referred to: revelation to inanimate objects, to animals lower than man, to human beings in general, to the prophets in particular, and to angels:

1. "On that day she (the earth) will tell her news, as if your Lord had revealed (*auḥā*) to her." — 99:4–5
2. "So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and revealed (*auḥā*) in every heaven its affair." — 41:12
3. "And your Lord revealed (*auḥā*) to the bee: Make hives in the mountains and in trees and in what they build, then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively." — 16:68–69
4. "And We revealed (*auḥai-nā*) to Moses' mother, saying: Suckle him; then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear, nor grieve. We shall bring him back to you and make him a messenger." — 28:7
5. "And when I revealed (*auḥai-tu*) to the disciples (of Jesus), saying, Believe in Me and My messenger…" — 5:111
6. "Surely We have revealed (*auḥai-nā*) to you (O Prophet Muhammad) as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him…" — 4:163
7. "When your Lord revealed (*yūḥī*) to the angels: I am with you, so make firm those who believe." — 8:12

(*Note:* The word used for "revealed" in Arabic is shown in each case above, and it is from the word *waḥy,* meaning 'revelation'.)

The Divine revelation to each class is, however, of a different nature, and we are chiefly concerned with the Divine revelation to human beings. That is said to be of three kinds:

> "And it is not granted to a mortal that Allah should speak to him, except by revelation (*waḥy*) or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases." — 42:51

The first of these, which is called *waḥy,* in the original, is the inspiring of an idea into the heart, for the word *waḥy* is here used in its literal significance of a hasty suggestion. This is different from *waḥy matluww,* or revelation in words, which comes under the third heading. The second mode of God's speaking to humans is said to be "from behind a veil", and this includes *ru'yā* (dream), *kashf* (vision), and *ilhām* (when voices are heard or uttered in a state of trance. The third kind, which is special to the prophets of God, is that in which the angel (Gabriel) brings the Divine message in words. This is the surest and clearest form of revelation, and such is the revelation of the Quran to the Holy Prophet. This is called *waḥy matluww,* or *revelation that is recited.*

Prophets

The first two kinds of revelation may be granted to prophets as well as to non-prophets, but the third is granted only to the prophets, and is the highest form of revelation. Thus, according to the Holy Quran, revelation is a universal fact, only its forms are different in the case of different recipients. In fact, God speaks just as He hears and sees. The revelation of the prophets is, therefore, not the solitary experience of a certain class of persons. The revelation received by prophets is only the most developed form of revelation; in a less developed form can come to any human being, whether or not they are believers in God. The Holy Quran speaks

of a vision of a king who was apparently not a believer in God (12:43), and it had a deep significance underlying it.

Revelation, therefore, is the universal experience of mankind, and the prophets received the highest form of it. Speaking of the first man, the Quran has told us why revelation from God was needed and what purpose it fulfilled. Man had two objects before him: to conquer nature and to conquer self, to bring under his control the powers of nature and his own desires. In the allegorical story of Adam, related in 2:30-39, we are told that Adam was given the knowledge of things, i.e. he was endowed with the capacity to obtain knowledge of all things.[1a] He was also gifted with the power to conquer nature, for the angels (beings controlling the powers of nature) made obeisance to him,[1b] but Iblis (the inciter of evil passions in man) did not make obeisance, and man fell a prey to his evil suggestions.[1c]

Man was powerful against all, but he was weak against himself, and he needed Divine help to give him sufficient strength to conquer his passions. This help came in the form of certain "words from His Lord" (2:37), i.e., in Divine revelation which was granted to Adam; and as regards his posterity, the Divine law was given:

> "Surely a guidance from Me will come to you, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. And as to those who disbelieve in and reject Our messages, they are the companions of the fire; in it they will abide." — 2:38–39

Revelation was thus needed to enable human beings to rise to higher stages of life, and in accordance with this Divine scheme, revelation was as much a need for one people as for another. God had endowed all humans with the power to conquer nature; not one particular nation to the exclusion of others. He gave His physical sustenance to all humans alike. Hence revelation which was

[1a] 2:31. [1b] 2:34. [1c] 2:36, 7:20-22.

needed for the moral and spiritual progress of humans could not be given to one person or to one nation to the exclusion of others. Prophets were, therefore, sent to every nation, though it was not necessary that the names of all of them should have been mentioned in the Quran:

> "And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them." — 35:24
>
> "And for every nation there is a messenger." — 10:47
>
> "And (We sent) messengers We have mentioned to you before and messengers We have not mentioned to you. — 4:164

That is not all. Belief in the prophets of other nations is one of the fundamental principles of Islam. One of the three chief articles of faith of a Muslim, as stated at the commencement of the Holy Quran is:

> "And who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you…" — 2:4

The Quran thus lays down the basis of a brotherhood of the whole human race to which no other heavenly book has made any approach. That God is Lord of all the nations of the world is not here a dry dogma; it is a living principle, not only recognising that all nations were equally treated physically as well as spiritually, but going even further and making it an article of faith in Islam that we believe in all those prophets as we believe in the Prophet Muhammad. Surely a universal religion upon which the whole human race could agree could not go further than this.

The Arabic word for prophet is *nabī*, which is derived from *nab'*, meaning an announcement of great utility, also a prophecy which gives information concerning the future. The word *nabī* in its literal significance is applicable to anyone to whom prophecies about the future are revealed, but in the technical language of Islam it is applicable only to a man who is chosen by God to deliver His

message to mankind. Such a person is also called a *rasūl* (messenger), which literally means *one sent.* The two words, *nabī* and *rasūl,* are interchangeable, but *rasūl* literally carries a wider significance, for the angels are also called *rusul* (messengers); see 35:1.

The prophet, according to the Holy Quran, must be a human being, and hence it does not accept the doctrine of incarnation, or God in flesh. The reformation of humans is entrusted to men to whom the Divine will is revealed, because only a man could serve as a model for men; even an angel could not have served that purpose. How could God in flesh serve as a model for frail human beings who have to meet hundreds of temptations, whereas for God there exists no possible temptation? Hence the Holy Quran has affirmed in the clearest words that only prophets or men to whom God revealed His will could be sent as reformers:

> "If there had been in the earth angels walking about secure, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as messenger." — 17:95

> "And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation;… Nor did We give them bodies not eating food, nor did they live forever." — 21:7–8

To every prophet was given a book for the guidance of his people:

> "Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people in that in which they differed." — 2:213

> "Certainly We sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the measure, that people may conduct themselves with equity." — 57:25

The prophets were all sinless, both their words and their deeds being in accordance with Divine commandments:

> "And We sent no messenger before you but We revealed to him that there is no God but Me, so serve Me. And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him! No, they are honoured servants. They do not speak before He speaks, and according to His command they act. — 21 :25–27
>
> "And it is not for a prophet to act dishonestly." — 3:161

The revelation of the prophets is specially guarded:

> "The Knower of the unseen, so He makes His secrets known to none, except a messenger whom He chooses. For surely He makes a guard to go before him and behind him, that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord." — 72:26–28

The idea that the devil can insert suggestions into a prophet's revelation is opposed to the above clear statement. The following verse is sometimes quoted in support of this idea:

> "And We never sent a messenger or a prophet before you but when he desired, the devil (*shaiṭān*) made a suggestion in regard to his desire." — 22:52

This verse does not speak of the revelation of prophets at all. What is spoken of here is not the prophet's revelation but his desire, i.e., his desire to establish the truth; and the devil here stands for the leaders of wickedness, as it does in 2:14,[2] the significance being that when the prophet desires to establish truth the evil-doers make evil suggestions into the hearts of their followers to oppose him.

[2] *Editor's Note:* "And when they meet those who believe, they say, We believe; and when they are alone with their *devils*, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking" (2:14). A certain group among Muslims were known as the hypocrites. To Muslims they claimed to be Muslims, but when they met their *devils* alone, i.e., the opponents of the Prophet, they claimed to be with them.

Ending of prophethood[3]

In the Holy Quran, the Prophet Muhammad is spoken of as the last of the prophets:

> "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the *Khātam al-nabiyyīn*, and Allah is ever Knower of all things." — 33:40

The word *khātam* means 'a seal' or 'the last part' of a thing, and *khātam al-nabiyyīn* thus means *the last of the prophets*.[4] The doctrine of the finality of prophethood in Muhammad (peace be upon him), therefore, rests on the clear words of the Holy Quran.

Hadith is even clearer on this point. The meaning of *khātam al-nabiyyīn* was thus explained by the Holy Prophet himself:

> "My example and the example of the prophets before me is the example of a man who built a house and he made it very good and very beautiful with the exception of a stone in the corner, so people began to go round it and to wonder at it and to say: Why has not this stone been placed? He [the Prophet] said: I am this stone and I am *khātam al-nabiyyīn*." [5]

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[3] *Editor's Note:* From here to the end of this chapter, the material is taken mainly from Maulana Muhammad Ali's book *The Religion of Islam* with some editing.

[4] While the word *khātam* means 'seal' as well as 'the last part' of a thing, the word *khātim* has the primary meaning of the last part of a thing. Both *khātam* and *khātim* are in the list of names of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. According to lexicons of classical Arabic, both *khātam* and *khātim,* when referring to a group of people, mean the last of them. The following standard lexicons say that the Holy Prophet being *Khātam al-nabiyyīn* means that he was the last of the prophets: *Mufradāt* of Raghib, *Lisān al-'Arab, Tāj al-'Arūs, Al-Qāmūs*, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ* and *Maqāyīs al-Lugha* of Ibn Fāris.

[5] Bukhari, book 61: 'Virtues (of the Prophet and his Companions)', ch. 18, h. 3535. This hadith, in which the Holy Prophet speaks of himself as the corner-stone of prophethood and the last of the prophets, is also related by Muslim (book 43: 'Virtues', ch. 7). See also Tirmidhi (book 49: 'Virtues', h. 3613). It is also reported by Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad* in more than ten places.

Another report in which the Holy Prophet speaks of himself as the last of the prophets is contained in the following words:

> "The Israelites were led by prophets; whenever a prophet died, another came after him; surely there is no prophet after me, but there will be successors, many of them." [6]

The idea that prophethood came to a close in the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad is the natural conclusion of the universalization of the theory of revelation which is the basic principle of the religion of Islam. As stated above, revelation according to the Holy Quran, is not the solitary experience of this or that nation but the spiritual experience of the whole of the human race. Allah is spoken of in the very opening verse as the *Rabb* ("Lord") of all the nations of the world, the *Nourisher unto perfection,* physically as well as spiritually, of the whole human race. Starting from that broad basis, the Holy Quran develops the theory that prophets were sent to every nation (see quotations given earlier). At the same time it is stated that every prophet was sent to a single nation and, therefore, though prophethood was in one sense a universal fact, it was more or less a national institution, the scope of the preaching of every prophet being limited to his own nation. The advent of the Holy Prophet Muhammad universalized the institution of prophethood in a real sense. The day of the national prophet was over, and one prophet was raised for the whole world, for all nations and for all ages:

> "Blessed is He Who sent down the *Furqān*[7] upon His servant that he might be a warner to [all] the nations." — 25:1

[6] Bukhari, book 60: 'Prophets', ch. 50, h. 3455. See also Muslim (book 33: 'Government', ch. 10). It is also in *Musnad* of Ahmad in several places.

[7] *Furqān* is a name for the Quran, meaning criterion or distinction, used in the Quran here and in 2:185 and 3:4.

> "Say: O mankind, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all, of Him Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth." — 7:158

> "And We have not sent you but as a bearer of good news and as a warner to all mankind, but most people do not know." — 34:28

The world-prophet therefore took the place of the national prophets, and the grand idea of unifying the whole human race, and gathering it together under one banner, was thus brought to perfection. Such unity could not be accomplished unless the finality of prophethood was established, for if prophets continued to appear after the world-prophet, they would undoubtedly demand the allegiance of this or that section, and shatter the very foundations of the unity at which Islam aimed by giving a single prophet to the whole world.

It may, however, be further added that by bringing prophethood to a close, Islam has not deprived the world of a blessing which was available to previous generations. The object of sending a prophet to a people was to make known the Divine will, and point out the ways by walking in which human beings could hold communion with God. That object was also brought to perfection through the great World-Prophet, Muhammad, whose message was so perfect that it met the requirements not only of all contemporary nations but of all future generations as well. This is plainly claimed by the Holy Quran, a claim not put forward by any other heavenly book or any other religion:

> "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion." — 5:3

The perfection of religion and the completion of the blessing of prophethood thus go hand in hand. Religion being made perfect, and prophethood being made complete, there remained no need

for another religion after Islam or for another prophet after Prophet Muhammad.

Continuance of lower forms of revelation

There is an erroneous idea in some minds that, in Islam, the door to revelation was closed with Prophet Muhammad, because it is stated in the Holy Quran that he is the last of the prophets. However, it has been shown above that, of the three kinds of revelation, two are common to both prophets and those who are not prophets, while only one form of revelation, the highest, in which the angel Gabriel is sent with a message in words, is peculiar to the prophets. Therefore, when it is said that no prophet shall appear after Prophet Muhammad, it means that the door has been closed on that highest form of revelation.

The granting of revelation to those who are not prophets is an admitted fact, as shown before on the basis of clear Quranic verses. Therefore, revelation remains, and humanity will always have access to this great Divine blessing, though prophethood, having reached its perfection, has naturally come to an end. The doctrine of the continuance of revelation is clearly upheld in the Quran and the Hadith. The Quran says:

> "Those who believe and keep their duty, for them is good news (*bushrā*) in this world's life and in the Hereafter." — 10:63–64

According to one of the most reliable reports in Hadith, *bushrā* or *mubashshirāt* (both words having the same significance) are a part of prophethood. Thus the Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

> "Nothing remains of prophethood but *mubashshirāt*".

Being asked what was meant by *mubashshirāt,* he replied, "good (or true) visions". According to another hadith, he is reported to have said:

> "The vision of the believer is one of the forty-six parts of prophethood."

In another version of the same report, instead of the "vision of the believer", the words are "good (or true) visions" — *ru'yā ṣāliḥah.*[8] The word *vision* is used here in a wide sense, and includes the inspiration which is granted to the righteous. For we are told in yet another hadith:

> "There used to be among those who were before you persons who were spoken to [by God] though they were not prophets; if there is such a one among my people, it is Umar." [9]

The Holy Quran also says:

> "Those who say, Our Lord is Allah, then continue in the right way, the angels descend upon them saying: Do not fear, nor grieve, and receive good news of the Garden which you were promised." — 41:30

All these Hadith reports and the Quranic verses quoted above afford proof enough that revelation in some of its lower forms is continued after the Holy Prophet, and it is only the highest form of revelation, that brought by Gabriel, which has been discontinued with the termination of prophethood.

[8] For the three reports quoted here, see Bukhari, book 91: 'Interpretation of Dreams' — ch. 5, h. 6990, ch. 4, h. 6987 and ch. 4, h. 6989.

[9] Bukhari, book 62: 'Virtues of the Companions of the Prophet', ch. 6, h. 3689. See also Bukhari, book 60: 'Prophets', ch. 54, h. 3469.

PART 3 — HISTORIES OF PROPHETS

3.1: Adam

It should be borne in mind in reading the histories of the prophets, as given in the Holy Quran, that the object: is not to narrate history as such, but to bring out certain characteristics of the histories of different nations, to mention incidents which contain prophetic allusion to the Holy Prophet's life, or to the future of Islam, and to comfort the Prophet with illustrations from previous sacred history that truth shall ultimately be established and that opposition shall entirely fail and be over-thrown. The Quran does not concern itself with the details of those histories, not even with the details of what messages a prophet delivered to his people or how he was received. It contents itself with the broad facts that every prophet delivered the message of Unity, invited people to obey God and to do good to fellow-men, and aimed at the moral betterment of the people to whom he was sent. It shows, by mentioning prophets of Israelite and non-Israelite nationality, that the cardinal principles of the religion of all the prophets were one and the same.

The references in the earlier chapters are very brief. Whatever details there are belong to a period when opposition to the Prophet was at its height and the object is, no doubt, to tell the opponents, when they were at the height of their power, that they could not escape their ultimate overthrow. Another point worth noting is that every prophet is spoken of as being sent to a single nation, with the exception of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, who is spoken of as being sent to all the nations of the world.

The Holy Quran does not state when Adam was born or how he was born; it does not even state that he was the first man. The great Muslim divine, Muhammad ibn Ali al-Baqir, one of the twelve Shi'ah Imams, is reported to have said that "millions of Adams passed away before our father Adam," and Ibn Arabi, the head of the Sufis, writes in his great work, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya,* that forty thousand years before our Adam, there was another Adam. There is also a report accepted by the Imamiyya, according to which there were thirty Adams before our Adam, and this earth remained a waste after them for fifty thousand years; then it was inhabited for fifty thousand years; then was Adam created.

Again, the Holy Quran does not say how Adam was made. It does not accept the Bible theory of his formation. It does say, indeed, that he was made from dust, but then it speaks of every son of man as being created from dust as well:

> "O people, if you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then surely We created you from dust, then from a small life-germ, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh…" — 22:5

> "He it is Who created you from dust, then from a small life-germ, then from a clot, then He brings you forth as a child…" — 40:67

> "His companion said to him, while arguing with him: Do you disbelieve in Him Who created you of dust, then of a small life-germ, then He made you a perfect man?" — 18:37

Dust is the first stage of man's existence, and every man is made from it. How? The Holy Quran itself explains:

> "And certainly We create man of an extract of clay, then We make him a small life-germ in a firm resting-place…" — 23:12–13

> "…and He began the creation of man from dust. Then He made his progeny of an extract, of worthless seeming water. Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit and gave you ears and eyes and hearts; little thanks you give!" — 32:7–9

Thus man's creation from dust means his creation from an extract of dust, an extract which eventually appears as a life-germ, because from the earth comes the food which through several processes assumes the form of the life-germ.

It is noteworthy that the Holy Quran here speaks of the spirit of God being breathed into every human, and the spirit in this case is not the animal soul, but the soul that enables a man to distinguish between right and wrong, the *nafs nāṭiqa*, or the human soul or reason, and hence it is that the statement is immediately followed by the words, "and gave you ears and eyes and hearts".

Nor does the Quran accept the Bible statement that Eve was made from a rib of Adam.[1] It is no doubt stated in the Holy Book that God created mankind (*nās*):

> "from a single being (*nafs*) and created its mate of the same…" — 4:1

but the meaning is evidently, of the same kind or same essence, for elsewhere we are told that mates or wives are created for all men from themselves — Arabic *anfus*, plural of *nafs*, meaning selves or kind:

> "And Allah has made for you wives from among yourselves…" — 16:72

> "And of His signs is this, that He created mates for you from yourselves that you might find quiet of mind in them, and He put between you love and compassion." — 30:21

[1] Genesis 2:21–22.

The devil's opposition to Adam, which is the chief characteristic of Adam's story, as given in the Holy Quran, is mentioned in seven different places.[2]

To realise the true significance of the story, it is necessary to compare the various statements on the same or similar points. The first point is God's declaration of His will to create Adam or man:

> "When your Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal from dust." — 38:71
>
> "And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to create a mortal of sounding clay, of black mud fashioned into shape." — 15:28
>
> "And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth…" — 2:30

Now on the first two occasions, it is simply a mortal whose creation is spoken of, while on the third occasion it is one who rules in the earth. The first two descriptions in their generality, and the third in particular, apply to all human beings and not to Adam alone, and hence the story of Adam is really the story of every human being. Man's being a ruler refers to the high place he was intended to occupy on earth, ruling not only the animal creation but the very forces of nature, as the Quran repeatedly states.

It is only on one occasion that attention is drawn to the darker side of the picture of humanity, as 2:30 continues: "…they (the angels) said: Will You place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood?"

But the brighter side of that picture is presented in varying colours. In the Makkah revelations we have:

[2] The story occurs four times in early Makkah revelations (38:71–85, 17:61–65, 18:50, 20:116–124), twice in the later Makkah revelations (15:26–44, 7:11–25), and once in early Madinah revelation (2:30–39). At the end of this section (see p. 107), the following passages out of these are quoted in full for the reader's convenience: 38:71–85, 15:26–44, 2:30–39, 20:116–124 and 7:11–25.

> "So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit…" — 38:72, 15:29

This description, in another place, is expressly applied to every human being.[3] But in the later Madinah revelation, man's vast capability to rule is pointed out in the words:

> "And He taught Adam all the names." — 2:31

which means that He gave Adam knowledge of all the things, a knowledge which was not given even to the angels (2:32). In knowledge really lies the power of man. Hence it is that, in 38:72 and 15:29, immediately after the mention of his completion, as quoted above, there follows the command to the angels to make submission to Adam ("fall down submitting to him"), and after the mention of giving of knowledge to Adam in 2:31 the same command to the angels follows shortly in 2:34.

This, as I have already stated, is the chief characteristic of Adam's story, the command to angels to submit to Adam, showing that he is placed above even the angels, and that, below God, he occupies the highest place on earth. This is by virtue of his capacity for acquiring knowledge, and he acquires knowledge by slow degrees through his efforts; the light of the Divine spirit is within him, and by the use of that light he can rise to higher and higher eminences. Just as in the physical world, the acquirement of knowledge opens out before him new fields of advancement, so in the spiritual world the knowledge of things Divine opens out before him a higher life, a full manifestation of which begins with what is called the resurrection day.

Hence we find that with the angels submitting to Adam on all seven occasions, there is mentioned the refusal of Iblīs to submit.[4]

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[3] "Then He made *his progeny* of an extract, of worthless seeming water. Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit, and gave you ears and eyes and hearts; little thanks you give!" — 32:8–9

[4] See 38:74, 15:31, 2:34, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116 and 7:11.

Now *Iblīs* is the proper name of the devil, and in 18:50, he is plainly spoken of as being "from among the jinn" or invisible beings of a lower order, in contrast with the angels or invisible beings of a higher order. These invisible beings are connected with the spiritual life of man, the angel urging him to good and the devil stirring up the baser passions in him and thus retarding his advancement to the higher life, as the Quran says:

> "And every soul comes, with it a driver and a witness." — 50:21

Here the impeller to evil or the devil is called *a driver*, and the caller to good or the angel is called *a witness.* Hence when it is stated that the devil refused to submit to Adam or man, it means that man's baser passions which the devil excites are really a hindrance to his progress, and that to attain to a higher life it is necessary that the devil should be made to submit or that the baser passions in man must be subdued. That such is the real significance was explained by the Holy Prophet himself when, on being questioned if he too had a devil as every other human being had, he replied in the affirmative, and added: "But God has helped me over him, so he has submitted and does not command me anything but good." [5] The devil and his progeny are, therefore, called man's enemy,[6] with whom a man is required to carry on a struggle until the enemy submits to him.

The next point mentioned is that Adam and his wife are at first placed in a garden,[7] a description of which is thus given in one place:

> "Surely it is granted to you that you are not hungry therein, nor naked, and that you are not thirsty therein, nor exposed to the sun's heat." — 20:118–119

[5] Sahih Muslim, book 52: 'Description of Judgment Day', ch. 16.

[6] 18:50.

[7] 20:117, 7:19 and 2:35.

Then we are told that Adam and his wife were told to "eat from it a plentiful (food) wherever you wish" but a warning was added: "and do not approach this tree or you would be from among the unjust".[8a] In order to tempt Adam, "the devil made an evil suggestion to *them*"[8b] or "to *him*".[8c] It is noteworthy that in all the details of this story the Holy Quran does not accept the Bible statements. It is not the serpent, "more cunning than any beast of the field," which comes and speaks to Eve and leads her astray, she in her turn leading man astray.[9] It is the devil who makes an evil suggestion to Adam, or to both Adam and Eve, as he makes only evil suggestions to every son and daughter of Adam.

By the devil's evil suggestion, man is made to think that the forbidden tree "is the tree of immortality and a kingdom which does not decays";[10a] and the suggestion is that God had "only forbidden you this tree that you may not become angels or become immortals".[10b] Thus "he caused them to fall by deceit",[10c] and they both ate of the tree. And what were the consequences? "So they both ate of it, then their evil inclinations (or nakedness) became manifest to them, and they both began to cover themselves with leaves of the garden".[10d]

All this clearly shows that the garden is not an earthly garden, but stands for a state of contentment and rest in which there is no struggle. The tree which is not to be approached is always called "this tree" as if it had been just mentioned or as if it were a tree too well-known to need any description. This in itself gives an indication that it is the well-known tree of evil, for both good and evil are compared to two trees in 14:24–25 and elsewhere. This is further corroborated by the devil's description of it as "the tree of immortality" (20:120), by which he deceived man (7:22), showing

[8a] 2:35, 7:19. [8b] 7:20. [8c] 20:120.

[9] Genesis, 3:1–6.

[10a] 20:120. [10b] 7:20. [10c] 7:22. [10d] 20:121; 7:22.

that it is really the tree which brings death, i.e., the tree of evil. Another clue to the nature of this tree is afforded by 7:22 and 20:121, where the result of the eating of this tree is pointed out — — "their evil inclinations (or shame) became manifest to them". It is clearly the consciousness that one has done something wrong, something unworthy of himself. The attempt "to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden" (7:22; 20:121) is the desire to make up by human effort for the evil consequences of the fault committed. In fact, all this is placed beyond all doubt when the Quran, in ch. 7, goes on to speak immediately afterwards of two kinds of clothing, the external clothing "to cover your shame and for beauty," and the spiritual clothing, "clothing that guards against evil, that is the best" (7:26); and in the same strain it goes on to generalize in 7:27:

> "O children of Adam, do not let the devil seduce you, as he expelled your parents from the garden, pulling off from them both their clothing that he might show them their shame. He surely sees you, he as well as his company, from where you do not see them. Surely We have made the devils to be the friends of those who do not believe."

The next verse then speaks of the indecencies committed by the unbelievers, and thus it becomes too clear to need further comment that it is of the tree of evil that the Holy Quran speaks in this tree. When this is established, the conclusion is evident that the garden spoken of is a spiritual garden, the garden of contentment, as already pointed out. Its description as a garden where man feels no hunger,[11a] and at the same time eats from it a plentiful food,[11b] leads to the same conclusion. That the Quran is here speaking allegorically of spiritual truths is also clear from 20:124:

> "And whoever turns away from My Reminder, for him is surely a (spiritually) deprived life, and We shall raise him up blind on the day of Resurrection."

[11a] 20:118. [11b] 2:35.

The deprived life here clearly indicates the life spiritual. As a result of prompting man to evil, the devil, the inciter of the lower passions in man, is expelled from the garden forever:

> "He said: Go forth from here! surely you are driven away: and surely My curse is on you to the day of Judgment." — 38:77–78, 15:34–35.

Adam disobeys the Divine commandment through forgetfulness and not intentionally:

> "And certainly We gave a commandment to Adam before, but he forgot; and We found in him no resolve (to disobey)." — 20:115

He is also expelled from the garden, but only for a while, to carry on a struggle with the devil that is his enemy:

> "Go forth, some of you are enemies of others. And there is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time." — 2:36

> "Go forth from this (state) both — all (of you) — some of you are enemies of others." — 20:123

The state of struggle with the devil was destined to set mankind on the way to regain the garden. Human beings, who are gifted with the power even to rule the angels and who could, therefore, make the devil to submit to them, are expelled from the garden to make the necessary struggle and, through that struggle, helped by the Divine light of revelation, to regain the garden permanently, never more to be expelled from it. They turn to God and, finding help from that source of strength, conquer the devil:

> "They said: Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have not mercy on us, we shall certainly be from among the losers." — 7:23

> "Then Adam received (revealed) words from his Lord, and He turned to him (mercifully)." — 2:37

> "Then his Lord chose him, so He turned to him (mercifully) and guided (him)." — 20:122

If this is true of Adam in particular, it is also true of humans generally. Communion with the Divine being obtained through His revelation brings man to a state in which the devil is forever subdued, the state in which he has no more fear of the devil, nor does he commit evil to grieve over it:

> "Surely a guidance from Me will come to you, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve." — 2:38

> "Surely a guidance from Me will come to you; then whoever follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor be unhappy." — 20:123

Anyone who considers carefully the details of this story, its manifestly allegorical nature, and the great purpose underlying it — that everyone must carry on a struggle with his passions until he acquires the mastery over them — cannot for an instant entertain the idea that the Holy Quran is in any way indebted to the Bible for the story of Adam.

Passages from the Quran from which verses are quoted above

38:71–85

"(71) When your Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal from dust. (72) So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down submitting to him. (73) And the angels submitted, all of them, (74) but not Iblīs. He was proud and he was one of the disbelievers. (75) He said: O Iblīs, what prevented you from submitting to him whom I created with both My hands? Are you proud or are you one of the exalted ones? (76) He said: I am better than he; You have created me of fire, and him You did create of dust. (77) He said: Go forth from here! surely you are driven away: (78) and surely My curse is on you to the day

of Judgment. (79) He said: My Lord, grant me respite till the day when they are raised. (80) He said: Surely you are granted respite, (81) till the day of the time made known. (82) He said: Then, by Your Might! I will surely lead them all astray, (83) except Your servants from among them, the purified ones. (84) He said: The Truth is — and the truth I speak — (85) that I shall fill hell with you and with all those among them who follow you."

15:26–44

"(26) And surely We created man of sounding clay, of black mud fashioned into shape. (27) And the jinn, We created before of intensely hot fire. (28) And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to create a mortal of sounding clay, of black mud fashioned into shape. (29) So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down making submission to him. (30) So the angels submitted, all of them together — (31) but not Iblīs. He refused to be with those who submitted. (32) He said: O Iblīs, what is the reason that you are not with those who submit? (33) He said: I am not going to submit to a mortal, whom You have created of sounding clay, of black mud fashioned into shape. (34) He said: Then go forth, for surely you are driven away, (35) and surely on you is a curse till the day of Judgment. (36) He said: My Lord, grant me respite till the day when they are raised. (37) He said: Surely you are granted respite, (38) till the day of the time made known. (39) He said: My Lord, as You have judged me to be in error, I shall certainly make (evil) seem good to them on earth, and I shall cause them all to deviate, (40) except Your servants from among them, the purified ones. (41) He said: This is a right way with Me. (42) As regards My servants, you have no authority over them except such of the deviators as follow you. (43) And surely hell is the promised place for them all — (44) it has seven gates. For each gate is an appointed portion of them."

2:30–39

"(30) And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth, they said: Will You place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood? And we celebrate Your praise and

extol Your holiness. He said: Surely I know what you do not know. (31) And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; He said: Tell Me the names of those if you are right. (32) They said: Glory be to You! we have no knowledge but what You have taught us. Surely You are the Knowing, the Wise. (33) He said: O Adam, inform them of their names. So when he informed them of their names, He said: Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide. (34) And when We said to the angels, Be submissive to Adam, they submitted, but not Iblīs. He refused and was proud, and he was one of the disbelievers. (35) And We said: O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the garden, and eat from it a plentiful (food) wherever you wish, and do not approach this tree or you would be from among the unjust. (36) But the devil made them slip from it, and caused them to depart from the state in which they were. And We said: Go forth, some of you are enemies of others. And there is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time. (37) Then Adam received (revealed) words from his Lord, and He turned to him (mercifully). Surely He is Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful. (38) We said: Go forth from this (state) all. Surely a guidance from Me will come to you, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. (39) And (as to) those who disbelieve in and reject Our messages, they are the companions of the Fire; in it they will abide."

20:116–124

"(116) And when We said to the angels: Be submissive to Adam, they submitted, but not Iblīs; he refused. (117) We said: O Adam, this is an enemy to you and to your wife; so do not let him drive you both out of the garden so that you are unhappy. (118) Surely it is granted to you that you are not hungry therein, nor naked, (119) and that you are not thirsty therein, nor exposed to the sun's heat. (120) But the devil made an evil suggestion to him; he said: O Adam, shall I lead you to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which does not decay? (121) So they both ate of it, then their evil inclinations became manifest to them, and they began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden. And Adam disobeyed his

Lord, and was disappointed. (122) Then his Lord chose him, so He turned to him and guided (him). (123) He said: Go forth from this (state) both — all (of you) — some of you are enemies of others. Surely a guidance from Me will come to you; then whoever follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor be unhappy. (124) And whoever turns away from My Reminder, for him is surely a (spiritually) deprived life, and We shall raise him up blind on the day of Resurrection."

7:11–29

"(11) And We indeed created you, then We fashioned you, then We said to the angels: Be submissive to Adam. So they submitted, but not Iblīs; he was not of those who submitted. (12) He said: What hindered you from submitting when I commanded you? He said: I am better than he; You have created me of fire, while him You did create of dust. (13) He said: Then get forth from this (state), for it is not for you to behave proudly in it. Go forth, therefore, surely you are a degraded one. (14) He said: Grant me respite till the day when they are raised. (15) He said: Surely you are granted respite. (16) He said: As You have judged me to be in error, I will certainly lie in wait for them in Your straight path, (17) then I shall certainly come upon them from in front of them and from behind them, and from their right and from their left; and You will not find most of them thankful. (18) He said: Get out of it, despised, driven away. Whoever of them will follow you, I will certainly fill hell with you all. (19) And (We said): O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the garden, and eat from wherever you wish, but do not go near this tree or you would be from among the unjust. (20) But the devil made an evil suggestion to them that he might make manifest to them their shame that had been hidden from them, and he said: Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree that you may not become angels or become immortals. (21) And he swore to them both: Surely I am a sincere adviser to you — (22) thus he caused them to fall by deceit. So when they had tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden. And their Lord called to them: Did I not forbid you that tree, and say to you that the devil is

surely your open enemy? (23) They said: Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves; and if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we shall certainly be from among the losers. (24) He said: Go forth — some of you are enemies of others. And there is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time. (25) He said: In it shall you live, and in it shall you die, and from it shall you be raised."

3.2: Noah

The most important point in connection with Noah's history, as related in the Holy Quran, is that the deluge did not cover the whole face of the earth, nor did it bring about the destruction of all flesh on earth, as the Bible states.[1] The Quran has laid stress on the point in the earliest revelation, speaking of Noah in ch. 71, which opens with the statement that "We sent Noah to his people," and at the close states that Noah's people rejected him and "because of their wrongs they were drowned" (71:25). All references to Noah lay stress on this point, that only Noah's people who opposed the truth, persecuted Noah, and planned against his life, were drowned. Thus:

> "And make the ark under Our eyes and Our revelation, and do not speak to Me on behalf of those who are unjust. Surely they will be drowned." — 11:37
>
> "He said: My Lord, my people call me a liar. So judge between me and them openly, and deliver me and the believers who are with me. So We delivered him and those with him in the laden ark. Then We drowned the rest afterwards." — 26:117–120
>
> "But they rejected him, so We delivered him and those with him in the ark, and We made them rulers and drowned those who rejected Our messages." — 10:73; see also 7:64
>
> "And We helped him against the people who rejected Our messages. Surely they were an evil people, so We drowned them all." — 21:77

[1] Genesis, 7:21–23.

The only details of any importance about Noah are contained in the 11th chapter, which speaks of the making of an ark, Noah's embarking on it, and how it ultimately rested on the Judi, one of the mountains which divide Armenia on the south from Mesopotamia, and adds an incident about a son of Noah who was also drowned because he was "the doer of other than good deeds".[2] The ark is also mentioned in the following verses:

> "And We bore him on (a vessel) made of planks and nails, floating on, before Our eyes — a reward for him who was denied. And certainly We left it as a sign, but is there anyone who will be mindful?" — 53:13–15

This suggests that the remains of Noah's ark may be found somewhere preserved.

A very short notice of him, contained in 29:14–15, adds that he remained among his people for 950 years. This may refer either to his own span of life or to the duration of his law. In 66:10, his wife is mentioned along with Lot's wife as having acted treacherously towards him.

[2] 11:46.

3.3: Non-Biblical Prophets

The history of Noah in the Holy Quran is generally followed, when a chronological order is observed, by the history of the prophet Hūd, who was sent to the tribe of Ād. This tribe lived in the desert of *al-Aḥqāf,*[1a] extending from Oman to Hadramaut, in the south of Arabia. The tribe takes its name from Ād, the grandson of Aram, the grandson of Noah, and is sometimes called the first Ād[1b] as distinguished from the tribe of Thamūd, which is called the second Ād.

It was a powerful tribe, as the inscriptions now discovered show, and probably had spread far and wide. The prophet Hūd is not mentioned in the Bible, nor is the prophet Sālih who was sent to the tribe of Thamūd, which is often mentioned along with Ād, though territorially separated from it. Thamūd lived in al-Hijr[2] to the north of Madinah. The only important things mentioned about Ād are that:

1. They were successors of Noah's people (7:69).
2. They made lofty buildings (but the words thus translated may also signify that they were men of tall statures), being the most powerful nation of their day (89:7–8).
3. They were destroyed by a strong wind (69:6–7; 54:19).

About Thamūd we are told that they hewed out houses in the mountains, traces of these rock habitations being still met with in the Holy Prophet's time, and that they were destroyed by

[1a] 46:21. [1b] 53:50.

[2] 15:80.

an earthquake.[3] There is mention of a she-camel which was given to them as a sign, they being warned that if they slew the she-camel, punishment would overtake them. The many legends about this she-camel are not met with in the Quran, and the facts seem to be that they had laid a plan for the murder of their prophet[4] and the slaying of the she-camel was a sign that they were about to execute their final plan.

These are not the only prophets mentioned in the Quran about whom the Bible is silent. The Quran speaks of a prophet of the name of Luqmān who seems to have been an Ethiopian. His teachings are quoted as specially laying stress on humility and meekness.[5]

The Quran also speaks of a non-Israelite prophet who was contemporaneous with Moses and to whom Moses went in search of knowledge.[6] He lived at the junction of the two Niles,[7] i.e., at Khartoom.

Again it speaks of Darius I, a king of Persia, who is called Dhu-l-Qarnain, or the two-horned one, on the basis of Daniel's vision in the Bible,[8] and what is stated of him shows that he is also looked upon as the prophet of a nation. All this is quite in accordance with the clear doctrine laid down in the Holy Quran that a prophet was sent to every nation.

[3] See 7:74, 27:52 and 7:78.

[4] 27:48–49.

[5] 31:12–19.

[6] 18:60–82.

[7] 18:60.

[8] Daniel, 8:20.

3.4: Abraham

Abraham and Moses are the two prophets whose histories are given the greatest prominence in the Holy Quran, Abraham being spoken of nearly 70 times and Moses over 130 times. The importance of Abraham was due to his acceptance by all the three different communities that resided in Arabia, the Jews, the Christians, and the idolaters; he was thus in a way the link which united them, notwithstanding the divergence of their religious views. It is for this reason that they are again and again invited to the religion of Abraham:

> "And they say: Be Jews or Christians, you will be on the right course. Say: Rather, (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not one of those who set up partners (with Allah)." — 2:135
>
> "And who is better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to Allah while doing good (to others) and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one? And Allah took Abraham for a friend." — 4: 125
>
> "Say: As for me, my Lord has guided me to the right path — a right religion, the faith of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah)." — 6:161

Notwithstanding that the righteousness of Abraham was an established fact with these three communities, Abraham's religion was not the religion of any of them:

> "Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was an upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah)." — 3:67

The three communities are, in fact, told to find out the common element of the three religions, for only that could be the religion of Abraham. This common element was belief in the existence of the One Supreme God. The word *ḥanīf*, which I have translated "upright", is most frequently used in connection with Abraham. The root-word *ḥanf* means *inclining*, or *declining*, and hence *ḥanīf* means *one inclining to a right state* according to Raghib, the best authority on the lexicology of the Holy Quran. Wherever used, it seems to indicate a firmness in adhering to the right state as opposed to an *inclining* to polytheism on the part of the Jews and the Christians.

Abraham appears in the Holy Quran as the most forceful preacher against idolatry and polytheism of every kind,[1] and his zeal to rid humanity of this grossest of superstitions gives us really a picture of the Holy Prophet's mind. In fact, every prophet in the Holy Quran represents a particular phase of the character of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and Abraham stands for the iconoclastic tendency on the one hand and entire submission to God on the other.

He also preaches against the worship of heavenly bodies[2] but he went a step further and broke the idols, and this he did after he had plainly told his people that he would make clear to them the helplessness of their supposed deities:

> "And, by Allah! I will certainly plan against your idols after you go away, turning your backs. So he broke them into pieces, except the chief of them, that perhaps they might return to it." — 21:57–58

The same incident is also referred to earlier, in 37:91-96, where he is spoken of as having broken them secretly, i.e., in the

[1] His preaching against idolatry is referred to in 6:74, 19:42–48, 21:52–65, 26:69–84, 29:16–17, 37:85–96 and 43:26–27.

[2] See 6:75-83 and 37:88–89.

absence of their worshippers. This breaking of the idols by Abraham was no doubt a prophecy that the idols which then polluted the House sanctified by Abraham would ultimately be broken by the Holy Prophet, and so it happened after the conquest of Makkah. Abraham's zeal for the establishment of the Unity of God is also displayed by his leaving enduring traditions among the Arabs that he was a preacher of Unity:

> "And he made it[3] a word to continue in his posterity that they may return (to it)" — 43:28

The second phase of Abraham's character in which he represents the Holy Prophet is his entire submission to God. Though every prophet undoubtedly submitted to God, yet particular stress is laid upon Abraham's submission.[4] His submission to God was so perfect that, when he received a commandment to sacrifice his only son Ishmael, he did not hesitate a minute, though "when they both submitted and he had thrown him down upon his forehead," the voice of God came to him that he had "indeed fulfilled the vision", in obedience to which he was going to sacrifice his son, and that the sacrifice of a ram should commemorate the occasion as a sign that the animal in man was to be sacrificed to the divine in him.[5] Thus the incident affords an illustration of the complete submission of Abraham to God and contains, no doubt, a prophetic reference to the complete submission of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his followers, who showed their willingness to lay down their own lives and the lives of those dearest to them to defend the truth.

It may also be remarked here that, according to the Holy Quran, Ishmael was the son whom Abraham was ordered to sacrifice, as it speaks of the good news of Isaac's birth being given

[3] The word *it* here refers to the worship of One God.

[4] See 2:124, 2:131, 3:67, 4:125, 16:120, 37:83–84.

[5] See 37:103–107.

to Abraham after the incident of the sacrifice.[6] This contradicts the Bible statement, which speaks of Isaac as being the son who was ordered to be sacrificed; but the Bible contradicts itself when it says, in Genesis 22:2: "Take now your son, your only son Isaac". He is called "your only son" in verses 12 and 16. Now Isaac could not, by any stretch of imagination be called an "only son", as Ishmael was much older than Isaac. Only Ishmael could be called an only son before Isaac's birth, and, therefore, the text has no doubt been altered in favour of Isaac. Moreover, both the Bible and the Holy Quran agree that a ram was sacrificed instead of the lad, but the sacrifice of a ram is commemorated among Ishmael's descendants, not among Isaac's, and this is additional testimony to the truth of what the Quran states.

Another important point relating to Abraham is his connection and that of Ishmael with the Ka'bah, the sacred house at Makkah. The Quran does not leave the least doubt about it. It was there that Abraham had left Ishmael, not in the wilderness of Beershaba, as Abraham's prayer referred to in the Holy Quran shows:

> "Our Lord, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Your Sacred House, our Lord, that they may keep up prayer." — 14:37

From this, as also from a saying of the Holy Prophet, it further appears that Abraham had left Ishmael in Arabia in accordance with a Divine commandment,[7] not at the instigation of his wife Sarah, as the Bible would have it.[8] In fact, it was all done in accordance with a Divine scheme as stated in the Bible:

> "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head stone of the corner." — Psalms, 118:22

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[6] 37:112.

[7] Bukhari, book 60: Prophets, ch. 9, hadith 3364. Abraham's wife Hagar asked him: "Has Allah ordered you to do so?" He said: "Yes." She said: "Then He will not neglect us."

[8] Genesis, 21:10.

> "Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvellous in our eyes'?" — Matthew, 21:42.

Ishmael was that stone for, whereas from the descendants of Israel came numerous prophets, from the descendants of him who was cast into the wilderness, and whom the Israelites began to hate though he was their brother, came the last of the prophets who became the head of the corner.

The strong connection of Abraham and Ishmael with the Ka'bah is thus voiced in the Holy Quran:

> "And when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House: Our Lord, accept from us." — 2:127

From this it appears that Abraham and Ishmael rebuilt the Ka'bah. That it was there already is shown by 14:37, as also by 3:96, which calls it "the first house appointed for mankind." Abraham is also stated to have prayed for Makkah to be made the spiritual centre of the world:

> "My Lord, make this city secure, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols." — 14:35; see also 2:126.

Moreover, Abraham and Ishmael prayed for the raising up of a prophet from among their descendants:

> "Our Lord, and make us both submissive to You, and (raise) from our offspring, a nation submissive to You, and show us our ways of devotion and turn to us (mercifully); surely You are the Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful. Our Lord, and raise up in them a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your messages and teach them the Book and the Wisdom, and purify them. Surely You are the Mighty, the Wise." — 2:128–129

It is in reference to this prayer that the Holy Prophet is reported to have said: "I am the prayer of my father Abraham." The prayer for "a nation submissive to You", or a Muslim nation, as contained in 2:128, was clearly prophetical at the time of its revelation, for the circumstances then were against such a nation coming into existence, and the few scattered Muslims, against overwhelming numbers of opponents who were bent upon their extermination, could not be called a *nation*.

Another trait of Abraham's character in which he represents the Holy Prophet is that he was very lenient towards his foes, so much so that he pleaded for Lot's people to be saved, though he knew that they were transgressors,[9] and his prayer contains the memorable words:

> "So whoever follows me, he is surely of me; and whoever disobeys me, You surely are Forgiving, Merciful." — 14:36

This was his prayer despite the fact that he had to sever connection with those opponents:

> "We are clear of you and of what you serve besides Allah. We disbelieve in you and there has arisen enmity and hatred between us and you forever until you believe in Allah alone." — 60:4

Exactly in the same manner was the Holy Prophet compelled to sever his connection with the unbelievers, yet, in his hour of triumph, when all those enemies who had left no stone unturned to annihilate the Muslims were at his mercy, he forgave them all.

[9] 11:74-76.

3.5: Moses

Moses is the most frequently mentioned of all the prophets spoken of in the Holy Quran, and the details of his life are dwelt upon to a much greater extent than are the details of any other prophet's life. He is, moreover, the prophet to whom reference is made earliest in the Holy Book, in the chapter entitled al-*Muzzammil,* which stands third in the chronological order. Here it is that the reason is also met with for giving so much importance to his history:

> "Surely We have sent to you a Messenger, a witness against you, as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh." — 73:15

This verse points out the likeness of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to Moses, a likeness which Moses himself had pointed out in the Bible in the book of Deuteronomy:

> "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, … I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." — Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18

We are told twice that the promised prophet, the like of Moses, shall appear from among their "brethren." The people addressed here are the Israelites, and, therefore, "their brethren" could mean only the Ishmaelites. Actually no Israelite prophet ever claimed to be the like of Moses. Up to the time of Jesus Christ, we find the Israelites still awaiting the advent of the promised "like" of Moses, for John the Baptist was asked if he was Christ, or if he was Elias

or if he was "that Prophet", with reference to this prophecy, and he replied "no" in each of the three cases.[1] Nor did Jesus Christ ever say that he was the like of Moses, and his apostles still awaited the fulfilment of that prophecy after Jesus' crucifixion:

> "For Moses truly said to the fathers, The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you." — Acts 3:22

It was only the revelation of the Holy Prophet, and that the earliest, which pointed out the fulfilment of the prophecy of Deuteronomy in the advent of a Prophet like Moses. This claim is made still plainer in a later revelation:

> "Say: Have you considered if it is from Allah, and you disbelieve in it, and a witness from among the Children of Israel has borne witness of one like him…" — 46: 10

The history of Moses begins with a revelation to his mother to cast the child into the river, where he is picked up by Pharaoh's people,[2a] and brought up by Pharaoh.[2b] When grown up, he finds one day an Israelite being oppressed by an Egyptian and strikes the Egyptian with his fist in order to save the Israelite. The Egyptian is accidentally killed, and Moses, on being informed that he cannot expect any justice from the authorities, escapes to Midian.[2c] There he meets Jethro, marries his daughter and, after ten years, goes back to Egypt.[2d]

On his way back, he is called to the office of a prophet,[3a] and sees in a visionary state that his staff has become a serpent and his hand is white.[3b] He is commanded to go to Pharaoh and to demand

[1] John, 1:20–21. The King James Version has "that prophet", but the Revised Standard Version and the New King James Version have "the prophet".

[2a] 20:38–39, 28:7–8. [2b] 26:18. [2c] 28:14–22. [2d] 28:22–29.

the deliverance of the Israelites.[3c] He asks for a helper, Aaron, his brother.[3d]

Pharaoh has a discussion with him.[4a] A secret believer from among Pharaoh's people argues on behalf of Moses.[4b] Pharaoh demands signs, and the two signs of the staff and the hand are shown.[4c] Pharaoh calls to his aid the enchanters, whose tricks do not avail aught against Moses,[4d] and they believe in him.[4e]

Moses then shows other signs, nine in all.[5a] Every time that distress befalls Pharaoh, he requests Moses to pray for its removal, promising to believe when it was removed, but fails to keep his promise.[5b] Moses exhorts his people to patience and prayer.[5c] He is ultimately commanded to leave Egypt and crosses the sea, while Pharaoh and his hosts are drowned.[5d]

He then retires to the mountain for forty days to receive the law,[6a] and the Israelite leaders with him demand that God should be shown to them manifestly.[6b] Moses prays to God that He may show Himself to him.[6c] A severe earthquake overtakes Moses and his companions, and they fall down in a state of swoon. Moses recovers[6d] and prays for his companions,[6e] who are restored to their senses.[6f]

Moses is given the Torah,[7a] the book being revealed to him[7b] as books were revealed to other prophets. On his return, he finds

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[3a] 19:52, 20:11–16, 27:8–9, 28:30, 79:15–16. [3b] 20:17–23, 27:10–12, 28:31–32.
[3c] 7:103–105, 20:47, 26:16–17; 44:17–18. [3d] 20:29–34, 26:13, 28:34–35.
[4a] 20:47–55, 26:18– 29. [4b] 40:28–45. [4c] 7:106–108, 26:30–33, 79:20.
[4d] 7:109–126, 10:79–82, 20:60–73, 26:36–51. [4e] 7:120–126, 20:70–73, 26:46–51.
[5a] 7:130–133, 17:101. [5b] 7:134–135, 43:49–50. [5c] 7:128, 10:84–86.
[5d] 2:50, 7:138, 10:90, 20:77–78, 26:52–66.
[6a] 2:51, 7: 143–145, 20:83–84. [6b] 2:55. [6c] 7:143. [6d] 7:143. [6e] 7:155.
[6f] 2:55–56.

his people worshipping the image of a calf which they had made in his absence under the directions of one called a Samiri.[7c] Aaron had warned them of their error before the coming of Moses, but they did not give it up.[7d] The image is burned and the ashes are scattered in the sea.[7e]

Moses orders his people to slaughter a cow, which they were unwilling to do, and obeyed the order after much hesitation.[8a] His own people make false imputations against him.[8b] He asks his people to march on the Holy Land, but they refuse, and are made to wander in the wilderness for forty years.[8c]

I have given some of the more important details of Moses' life. Many other details are met with which the reader can see for himself. It would be noted that there are here some very important differences from the Bible narrative; for instance, Moses is not shown to be guilty of the murder of the Egyptian, his death being only accidental; nor is Aaron guilty of making or helping to make the calf. The importance attached to his life-story is due to his likeness to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Moses was both a law-giver and a nation-builder, and so was the Holy Prophet Muhammad to be. These two characteristics are not to be met with in any other Israelite prophet, and it will be seen that the details given above, as well as the other details met with about Moses in the Holy Quran, relate to one or other of these two characteristics, more to the latter than to the former. In both these capacities, as a law-giver and as a nation-builder, the Holy Prophet Muhammad had to work on an immensely wider scale than did Moses.

The law of Moses was meant for a particular race, the Israelites, and even among them prophets appeared after Moses to meet

[7a] 7:142–145. [7b] 2:53, 6:91. [7c] 2:51, 7:148–150, 20:85–89.
[7d] 20:90–91. [7e] 20:97.
[8a] 2:67–71. [8b] 33:69, 61:5. [8c] 5:21–26.

the new needs and to effect the necessary alterations and abrogations; but the law given to the Holy Prophet Muhammad was meant for the whole human race and was made perfect, as he was the Prophet for all nations and for all times, no prophet appearing after him. This difference is repeatedly brought out in the Holy Quran; the following quotations serve only as an example:

> "And We indeed gave Moses the Book — so do not doubt the meeting with Him — and We made it a guide for the Children of Israel." — 32:23
>
> "Blessed is He who sent down the *Furqān* upon His servant that he may be a warner to the nations." — 25:1
>
> "And it is nothing but a Reminder to the nations." — 68:52
>
> "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you…" — 5:3

Though the law is made perfect in the Holy Quran and no prophet appears after the Holy Prophet Muhammad, yet, to meet new needs, the door is always open to work out the principles enunciated in the Holy Book and to deduce new laws for them to meet the requirements of the times.

As a nation-builder, the work of Moses occupies a very prominent place in his own life-story as well as in the history of the world. It was the first message with which he was entrusted:

> "Then come to Pharaoh, and say: We are bearers of a message of the Lord of the worlds: Send with us the Children of Israel." — 26:16–17

The law was given to him long afterwards. The work was no doubt one of the greatest difficulty, for the Israelites had been in a state of slavery to the Pharaohs of Egypt for about four centuries. But great and important as was Moses' work, his message was very limited in comparison with the message with which the Holy

Prophet Muhammad was entrusted. He had to build a nation on quite a new principle, a nation not united by any ties of blood, race, colour, or country, but united by a moral and spiritual outlook, united by a belief in the Unity of God and in His all-pervading Lordship. Such was to be the Muslim nation in which the Arab and the non-Arab, the white and the black, the Semitic and the Aryan, were all to be on one level. The whole world was the country and the whole of humanity the race, out of which this nation was to be formed. With this apparently impossible task the Prophet was entrusted and, singlehanded, in the face of all difficulties, he built up the foundations of the new nation within the short period of twenty years. Such a huge task cannot be placed to the credit of any other man in the history of the world.

3.6: Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is mentioned by three different names: *ʻĪsā* (Jesus), *Ibn Maryam* (the son of Mary), and *al-Masīḥ* (the Messiah). *ʻĪsā,* or Jesus, is the proper name; he is called the son of Mary to show that, like every human child, he was born of a woman, and one born of a woman could not be God;[1] and he is called the Messiah because he held the office of a prophet among the Israelites. But *masīḥ* also means one *who travels in the land*, and the title may have reference to his travels from one country to another.

Jesus Christ is mentioned by himself some thirty-five times in the Holy Quran, and the longest notices of him which speak of his birth and mission are those in which he is mentioned along with John the Baptist or *Yaḥyā*. These occur in ch. 19, which receives the name 'Mary', his mother, and is one of the early Makkah revelations, and in ch. 3, which receives the name 'The Family of 'Imran', and is one of the early Madinah revelations. Besides these two occasions where the life-story of Jesus Christ is dealt with at some length, along with the Christian doctrine, there is another early Makkah revelation, the 18th chapter, which deals with the history of Christianity, and the 5th chapter, a late Madinah revelation, which deals at length with the Christian violation of the covenant.

Another important fact in connection with the mention of Jesus Christ is that, though the same importance is not given to his life-story as to that of Moses, yet much importance is attached to a refutation of the erroneous doctrines connected with his name, a

[1] "…how can he be pure who is born of a woman?" (Job, 25:4).

refutation starting with one of the earliest revelations in ch. 112 and continuing up to the latest in ch. 9.

As regards the life-story of Jesus Christ, the earliest revelation is ch. 19, which opens with the prayer of Zacharias for a son, and the first section deals with the birth and mission of John. The second section deals with the birth and mission of Jesus Christ. Verse 16 states that Mary, who lived in the holy temple as a child,[2a] had to leave the precincts of the temple for an eastern place, probably Nazareth. This no doubt took place on her attaining puberty, for the Jews considered a woman to be impure during her monthly courses. There she received in a vision the news of the birth of a son.[2b] She wonders, because she had not as yet been married, [2c] and is told that the child to whom she would give birth would be made a guide for the people, "a sign to men and a mercy from Us".[2d] We are then told that she conceived him,[2e] and according to a saying of the Holy Prophet she conceived him "as women conceive". After this she had to go to a distant place,[2f] and her confinement came during the journey.[2g]

The third chapter, *The Family of Imran*, gives some details on these points not to be met with in ch. 19. In the first place, it speaks of the birth of Mary herself, who, according to a vow made by her mother, was to be devoted to the service of the temple at Jerusalem.[3a] Despite this, she prays, when she gives birth to the child, that both the girl and "her offspring" may be vouchsafed Divine protection as against the devil,[3b] showing that her mother expected her to marry and bear children as women do. As a child, she remained in the charge of Zacharias and was brought up as a devout child.[3c] Here the subject is changed, Zacharias praying for and being granted a son, John the Baptist. The original subject is reverted to, and Mary is spoken of as being chosen above other

[2a] 3:37. [2b] 19:19. [2c] 19:20. [2d] 19:21. [2e] 19:22.
[2f] Compare Luke 2:2–6. [2g] 19:22–23.

women of her time.[3d] Evidently this refers to the time when she was quite a grown-up girl, and then we are again told that there was a contention as to the man in whose charge Mary should be placed.[3e] This in all probability refers to arrangements for her marriage, for her charge as a child has already been spoken of clearly.[3f]

It is at this point that the earlier narrative in ch. 19 began by speaking of her leaving the precincts of the temple for an eastern place. The part common to both narratives is her receiving the news in a vision. According to 3:45, the angels spoke to her, saying that she would give birth to a son, who would come in fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy. The next verse tells us that he would attain to old age and be one of the righteous. In 3:47 she wonders, because her marriage had not as yet taken place, and is re-assured, as in 19:20–21. The further details of conception and birth are not met with in ch. 3.

In both narratives, however, there is a gap up to the time that Jesus is called and preaches to his people. In ch. 3, the news of the birth of a son in v. 47 is immediately followed in vv. 48 and 49 by the call of Jesus and his preaching. In ch. 19, the account of his birth is similarly followed. Evidently the coming of Mary with Jesus to her people, as spoken of in 19:27, does not relate to the time of the birth, which is the subject-matter of the previous verse, but to a later time. This is because it is unthinkable that a woman should thus make a show of a new born baby, and because Mary at the time was journeying to a distant place, as stated in 19:22. Verse 27, speaking of Mary going along with Jesus to her people while he was riding an animal, probably contains a reference to the episode of Jesus riding on an ass and a colt.[4] Moreover, the reply given by Jesus to the people on this occasion, in 19:30–33, cannot possibly relate to the time when he was a mere baby, because in

[3a] 3:35. [3b] 3:36. [3c] 3:37. [3d] 3:42. [3e] 3:44. [3f] 3:37.

[4] See Gospel of Matthew 21:1–7.

that reply he clearly speaks of having been made a prophet and having been commanded to say prayers and give alms while he lived. A baby a day old could not have been made a prophet, nor could he be commanded to say prayers and give alms. Here is Jesus' reply, conclusively showing that this occasion relates to the time when Jesus had received the call, and offended the elders of the Israelites by his preaching:

> "He said: I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet, and He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and the due charity so long as I live, and to be kind to my mother; and He has not made me insolent, unblessed." — 19:30–32

As I have said, however, greater stress is laid upon the doctrines connected with the name of Jesus than upon the details of his life, and even the circumstances relating to his life are meant to be a denial of his divinity. We are told that his mother conceived him, quite a superfluous detail of life-history unless it is meant to show that he could not be God or the son of God, for the idea of conception in the mother's womb is incompatible with Divinity. The severity of pains during labour makes Mary utter:

> "Oh, I wish I had died before this…" — 19:23

This is not only to show that Mary gave birth to Jesus in the ordinary circumstances which women experience in giving birth to children, but also seems to contain a deeper reference to the statement in the Bible, "In pain you shall bring forth children",[5] which, according to the Bible, was the punishment inflicted on woman because of Eve's alleged sin. He is also mentioned in the Quran (3:46) as speaking "when in the cradle and when of old age", to show the change of condition from childhood to old age, while change in the Divine Being is impossible.

[5] Genesis, 3:16.

The prominent features of his preaching when called to the office of a prophet also show the same tendency. He is spoken of as "a servant of God",[6a] by no means disdaining to be a servant of God,[6b] as "a prophet",[6c] "a messenger to the children of Israel",[6d] nothing more than a messenger before whom numerous messengers had passed away,[6e] one who had to learn "the Torah",[6f] repeatedly saying: "God is my Lord and your Lord; therefore serve Him".[6g] Along with his mother, he is spoken of as "eating food",[6h] showing that he had all the needs and weaknesses of a mortal. He is even made to deny his divinity in plain words:

> "And when Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah? He will say: Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right to (say)." — 5:116

A noteworthy feature of the narrative of Jesus Christ in the Holy Quran is the mention of his death which occurs three times in plain words and several times by implication:

> "When Allah said: O Jesus, I will cause you to die and exalt you in My presence and clear you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of Resurrection." — 3:55

> "I said to them nothing but what You commanded me: Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord; and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when You caused me to die You were the Watcher over them. And You are Witness of all things." — 5:117

> "They indeed disbelieve who say: Surely, Allah — He is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say: Who then could control anything as against Allah when He wished to destroy the

[6a] 19:30, 43:59. [6b] 4:172. [6c] 19:30. [6d] 3:49. [6e] 5:75.
[6f] 3:48. [6g] 3:51, 5:117, 19:36, 43:64. [6h] 5:75.

> Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother and all those on the earth?" — 5:17

The first of these verses shows that Jesus Christ was comforted by Divine revelation, when his enemies planned to take away his life by violence, that he would be made to die a natural death; but this promise does not stand alone; it is the first of four promises: death, after death exaltation in the Divine presence, then clearance from false charges, and lastly the triumph of the Christians over the Jews. The order in which these promises are mentioned is the order in which they actually took place. The second verse shows that the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus Christ did not grow up before his eyes, but was invented by his followers after his death, and the verse is conclusive as showing that Jesus Christ was made a god after his death. The third reason gives the reason for laying stress on his death, and says in effect that, if Jesus Christ had been God, as alleged by the Christians, he would not have tasted of death, as; did his mother and his compatriots.

Of the verses which speak of Jesus Christ's death by implication, I would content myself with only three:

> "The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger — messengers had indeed passed away before him. And his mother was a truthful woman. They both used to eat food." — 5:75

> "And Muhammad is but a messenger — messengers have already passed away before him." — 3:144

> "And those whom they call on besides Allah created nothing, while they are themselves created. Dead (are they), not living. And they do not know when they will be raised." — 16:20–21

The first verse in this case states that, as all the messengers before Jesus had died, so he, too, must have died, because like them he was a mortal and like them he ate food. The second states

clearly that all the prophets before Muhammad had passed away and thus includes Jesus Christ among the dead. The third says that all those who had been taken as gods before the Quran — and Jesus Christ was one of them — were dead, not one of them being alive. Yet, in spite of so many clear statements, the idea finds acceptance among the Muslims that Jesus Christ is still alive. This idea no doubt came originally from the Christian tradition. Then, owing to the prophecy of a second advent of the Messiah to be found in Hadith, it slowly gained ground.[7] There is nothing, however, in the Holy Quran, or even in the sayings of the Holy Prophet, which lends any support to this idea. True it is that the Holy Quran speaks of the *raf'*, or exaltation, of Jesus, but it is after his death, as plainly stated in 3:55. Nor does *raf'* (exaltation) by God signify a translation of the body of a mortal to heaven; it signifies only exaltation in rank.

One point, however, needs to be elucidated. The Holy Quran negatives the death of Jesus on the cross, but a negation of death by crucifixion does not amount to a negation of natural death. What actually happened is stated thus:

> "and they did not kill him, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ concerning it are in doubt about it." — 4:157

The Quran thus asserts that Jesus Christ did not meet with his death on the cross, but was made to resemble one crucified. The story that he was lifted up to heaven while someone else was made to resemble him and suffered crucifixion is one of which no trace is met with in the Holy Book, nor in any saying of the Holy Prophet.

[7] The prophecy meant nothing more nor less than the appearance of one in the *spirit and power* of Jesus, and not Jesus himself. Compare the prophecy of the return of Elijah. It was said to be fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist and it is stated about him: "He will also go before Him in the *spirit and power* of Elijah" (Luke, 1:17).

What the Quran says concerning the crucifixion of Jesus — that he was nailed to the cross but did not die on it — is exactly what appears to be the truth from a perusal of the Gospels. The Quran is not a book of history and is not concerned with the details of what happened to him after the crucifixion, but it tells us that both he and his mother were given "a shelter on a lofty ground having meadows and springs" (23:50), which description applies to Kashmir; and there is a saying of the Holy Prophet that Jesus lived to the age of 120 years.

Thus, according to the Quran, Jesus Christ was born like a mortal and he died like a mortal. He lived the life of a righteous man and was entrusted with a Divine message "to the Israelites",[8a] but these people rejected him, planned against his life, and denounced him as a bastard, calling his mother an adultress.[8b] If the Quran had, therefore, to denounce the doctrine of his divinity it had also to defend him against false accusations. It is for this reason that it speaks of his mother as "a truthful woman",[8c] and speaks of Jesus Christ himself as "a word" from God[8d] and "a spirit from Him." [8e]

He is called a word from God because he came in fulfilment of a word "which He communicated to Mary",[9a] just as the Holy Prophet is reported to have said, "I am the prayer of my father, Abraham," because of the prayer of Abraham referred to in the Quran.[9b] Mary was told that the son she would bear would be a righteous man and a prophet, and it is in reference to this prophecy that he is called a *word from* God.[9c] Or, it may be in reference to the prophecies of the previous prophets, that he may have been so called.

Similarly, his being called a spirit from Him may be in reference to the denial of the charge of illegitimacy against him,

[8a] 3:49. [8b] 4:156. [8c] 5:75. [8d] 3:45. [8e] 4:171.

[9a] 4:171. [9b] See 2:129. [9c] 3:45.

because illicit sexual relations are ascribed to the devil. It must, however, be borne in mind that Jesus is spoken of only as "*a* word" from God or "*a* spirit" from Him, and not as *the* word or *the* spirit. Though he may have been called a word especially with reference to the prophecy of his birth, yet every creature of God is His word in one sense, because it comes into existence by a Divine commandment, and hence it is that the Holy Quran speaks of the words of God as being too numerous to be exhausted by writing down:

> "Say: If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, the sea would surely be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought as much again to add (to it)." — 18:109

Similarly, though he may have been called a spirit from God in reference to the charge against his mother, the Holy Quran also speaks of the spirit of God being breathed into every human being:

> "Then He made his progeny of an extract, of worthless seeming water. Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit…" — 32:8–9

This mention of the spirit of God being breathed into every man seems to be directed against the Christian doctrine that every man is born in sin and a bond-slave to the devil.

3.7: Other Biblical Prophets

Enoch (Idrīs)

Of the other Bible prophets mentioned in the Holy Quran, Enoch, who appeared before Noah, is mentioned twice under the name of Idrīs.[1a] His being raised to an elevated state[1b] has been misconstrued to mean his being raised alive to heaven, and here, too, the influence of Christian tradition has been at work. The Bible says that "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him,"[1c] but Paul goes a step further and says: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death: and was not found because God had translated him" [1d] Reliable commentators have, however, held that what is stated about Enoch in the Quran as being "raised to an elevated state" signifies only his exaltation to the rank of prophethood, and not his physical translation to upper regions.

Lot (Lūṭ)

Lot is mentioned along with Abraham because he was contemporaneous with him and was also his nephew.[2a] Some Christian writers have found fault with the Quran in recognising him as one of the prophets because Genesis 19:30–38 has a story of his incestuous intercourse in a state of intoxication with his daughters. However, this is quite inconsistent even with his righteousness as asserted by Abraham earlier in the same book.[2b] Later in the Bible he is called "just Lot" whose "righteous soul" was vexed with the filthy deeds of the Sodomites.[2c] The Holy Quran thus accepts him to be what he truly was, a righteous man and a prophet who was

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[1a] 19:56, 21:85. [1b] 19:57. [1c] Genesis, 5:24. [1d] Hebrews, 11:5.

[2a] See 11:69–83, 15:51–76, 29:16–26, 31-35, 51:24–37. [2b] Genesis, 18:23.

[2c] 2 Peter, 2:7–8.

sent to reform the Sodomites, and rejects as untrue what is related about him in the Bible in Genesis 19:30-38.

As regards Lot's wife, the Quran does not accept the Bible story that she was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back when she left the Sodomites with Lot;[3a] instead, it says that she was destroyed along with the Sodomites, as she did not go with Lot,[3b] and "acted treacherously towards" him.[3c] The punishment which overtook Lot's people, though often called merely a rain, is plainly stated to be a rain of stones.[3d] It is also called a rumbling, thus showing clearly that it was an earthquake; hence the place is said to have been "turned upside down".[3e]

Abraham's sons and descendants

Of Abraham's sons, Isaac (Isḥāq) is accepted as a prophet by the Bible as well as the Holy Quran, but a marked difference is observable about Ishmael (Ismā'īl). The Quran refers to him repeatedly as one of the prophets. Nothing is said about the people to whom he was sent, but a report speaks of his having been sent to the people of Yemen. The Bible, on the other hand, does not speak of him as a prophet, but the promise made to Ishmael is not substantially different from the promise made to Abraham:

> "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation." — Genesis, 17:20

This shows clearly that, according to the Bible, Ishmael was righteous in the sight of God. Abraham's grandson, Jacob (Ya'qūb),[4a] is also included by the Quran among the prophets. Jacob's son, Joseph (Yūsuf), is specially mentioned and the whole of ch. 12 is devoted to his history. This chapter contains numerous prophetical hints in relation to the history of the Holy Prophet himself.[4b]

[3a] Genesis, 19:26. [3b] 7:83, etc. [3c] 66:10. [3d] 11:82, 15:74. [3e] 15:73-74.

[4a] 11:71. [4b] See 12:3, 7 and 102.

Among Abraham's descendants, and previous to Moses, is Shu'aib, who was sent to Midian, a city on the Red Sea. Shu'aib is generally considered to be the Arabic name for Jethro. He is also supposed to be the man whose daughter Moses married when he fled to Midian.[5a] He is mentioned by name only four times in the Holy Quran. In his teaching special stress is laid on the giving of full measure and weight. Shu'aib is also spoken of as being sent to the dwellers of the thicket,[5b] but whether or not they were the same as the people of Midian cannot be said; in all probability they were identical.

Aaron (Hārūn)

Aaron is very often mentioned with Moses, of course. He received revelation just like prophets before him, such as Noah and Abraham, just like his brother Moses, and just like David, Solomon and Jesus after him.[6a] Moses asked God to give him as an aider his brother Aaron and: "add to my strength by him, and make him share my task".[6b] God replied: "We will strengthen your arm with your brother, and We will give you both an authority".[6c]

Aaron was commanded to go along with Moses as two messengers to Pharaoh:

> "Go you (Moses) and your brother with My messages… Go both of you to Pharaoh, … and say: Surely we are two messengers of your Lord…" — 20:42–47

They were both given the Torah:

> "And certainly We conferred a favour on Moses and Aaron. … And We gave them both the clear Book. And We guided them on the right way. And We granted them among the later generations (the salutation): Peace be on Moses and Aaron!" — 37:114, 117–120

[5a] 28:27. [5b] 26:176–177.

[6a] 4:163, 6:84. [6b] 20:29–32. [6c] 28:35.

The chief point in which the Holy Quran makes a departure from the Bible narrative is Aaron's alleged making of a calf for the Israelites to worship.[7] The Quran not only clears him of idol-making, but shows him as plainly admonishing the Israelites because of their worship of the calf:

> "And Aaron indeed had said to them before: My people, you are only tried by it, and surely your Lord is the Beneficent God, so follow me and obey my order." — 20:90

David (Dāwūd)

Among the prophets of the Mosaic dispensation, besides Jesus Christ, David and Solomon are given the greatest prominence, and the glory to which the Israelite kingdom arose under those prophet-kings is referred to on more than one occasion. In fact, all this is history containing prophecy of the greatness of Islam. The chapters containing it are those which were revealed at Makkah when opposition to the Prophet was at its height and his cause seemed to be quite hopeless. The repetition of this history was a comfort to the Muslims as showing that the time was coming when all this opposition would be brought to naught and Islam would shine forth in all her glory.

The prominence given to the history of John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and to that of David and Solomon on the other, of whom the former stood for the spiritual greatness of the Mosaic dispensation and the latter for its material greatness, was in fact a clear indication that the Holy Prophet was destined to occupy the position of both a spiritual world-teacher and a king. This is made clear by expressly calling the Prophet Muhammad the like of Moses, as has already been pointed out, and again by likening the Muhammadan dispensation to the Mosaic dispensation in 24:55.

[7] Exodus, ch. 32.

The longest notice of David is that contained in 38:17–26 which begins with his conquests and his kingdom:

> "Bear patiently what they say, and remember Our servant David, the possessor of power. He ever turned (to Allah). Truly We made the mountains subject to him, glorifying (Allah) at nightfall and sunrise, and the birds gathered together. All were obedient to him." — 38:17–19

That his conquests and kingdom are referred to in these words is made clear by what follows:

> "And We strengthened his kingdom and We gave him wisdom and a clear judgment." — 38:20

There is a similar description in ch. 34:

> "And certainly We gave David abundance from Us: O mountains, repeat praises with him, and the birds, and We made iron pliant to him, saying: Make ample (coats of mail)…" — 34:10–11

Here the words about iron and "coats of mail" clearly refer to wars. Despite his vast kingdom, he had to bear up with his enemies and treat them leniently:

> "And has the story of the adversaries come to you? When they made an entry into the private chamber by climbing the wall — when they came upon David so he was afraid of them." — 38:21–22

Strangely enough, this account of his enemies' planning against his life has been twisted by some less careful commentators, under the influence of Jewish tradition and the Bible, into the story that David committed adultery and that two angels came to remind him of the sin. The Quran plainly calls the two intruders *khasm* or enemies, and speaks of them as finding access to his private chamber by climbing the walls; thus, to suppose them to be angels is the height of absurdity. The Caliph Ali, when he heard the false

story related about David, said: "Whoever shall relate the story of David as the story-tellers relate it, I will give him 160 stripes, and this is the punishment of those who falsely charge the prophets." This incident is related by the great commentator, Razi, who also says: "Most of the learned and those who have searched for the truth among them declare this charge to be false and condemn it as a lie and as a mischievous story."

The only other important point related about David is his slaying of Goliath which occurs in a Madinah revelation:

> "And when they went out against Goliath and his forces, they said: Our Lord, pour out patience on us and make our steps firm and help us against the disbelieving people. So they put them to flight by Allah's permission. And David killed Goliath, and Allah gave him kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of what He pleased." — 2:250–251

Solomon (Sulaimān)

Solomon was heir to David's kingdom,[8a] but he further widened it by conquests. Here, too, it may be mentioned that the Holy Quran rejects the charge of idol-worship against Solomon, which the Bible prefers in plain words by asserting that the wives of Solomon "turned away his heart after other gods".[8b] The Quran disposes of this charge in a very few words:

> "And Solomon did not disbelieve but the devils disbelieved…" — 2:102

The Rev. T.K. Cheyne shows in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* that the Bible statement is incorrect:

> "That Solomon had a number of wives, both Israelite, and non-Israelite, is probable enough, but he did not make

[8a] 27:16. [8b] 1 Kings 11:4.

> altars for all of them, nor did he himself combine the worship of his wives' gods with that of Yahwe."

The Quran, however, goes further than this, for it says that the Queen of Sheba became a believer in God:

> "She said: My Lord, surely I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to Allah, the Lord of the worlds." — 27:44.

The longest notice of Solomon is that connected with his conquest of Sheba. It starts with a description of the immense resources of his kingdom:

> "O people, we have been taught the speech of birds, and we have been granted all sorts of things. Surely this is manifest grace. And his forces of the jinn and the men and the birds were gathered to Solomon, and they were formed into groups." — 27:16–17

The use of birds in conveying messages made birds a necessary adjunct to a military expedition, and the jinn were no doubt the hardy non-Israelite tribes subjugated to the Israelites. Elsewhere they are spoken of as those who "worked before him by the command of his Lord", and "made for him what he pleased of synagogues and images".[9a] Clearly these were the foreigners whom Solomon employed to build the Temple, men skilled in architecture. The famous scholar of Arabic literature and poetry, Yahya ibn Ali al-Tabrizi (d. 502 A.H.), writes that the Arabs "speak of the jinn frequently, likening a man who is clever in executing affairs to the *jinni* and the shaitan, or the devil".[9b] Men employed by Solomon in this and similar service are elsewhere spoken of as devils:

> "And the devils, every builder and diver, and others fettered in chains." — 38:37–38

[9a] 34:12–13. [9b] *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah.* See also Lane's Lexicon under *jinn.*

These last seem to be those who were forced into service or they may have been prisoners of war.

After Solomon sets out for the conquest of Sheba, he passes the valley of the Naml.[10a] This should not be translated as the valley of the ants, for Naml, though meaning *ants*, is here used as a proper name, and *wād al-Naml*, or the valley of the Naml, is "situated between Jibrin and 'Asqalan".[10b] Moreover, the Namlah are plainly spoken of as a tribe.[11] This tribe, which very likely intervened between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and formed a kind of buffer state, submitted to Solomon, and hence we find Solomon giving thanks to God:

> "My Lord, grant me that I may be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed on me and on my parents…" — 27:19

A similar mistake is made in connection with Hudhud, who is undoubtedly mentioned as an officer of Solomon, but the word is misunderstood to mean a bird, the lapwing. A similar name in the Bible is Ben-Hadad, a king of Syria,[12] and the Arab writers speak of a king of Himyar as Hudad. The mistake arises from the fact that his name is mentioned in connection with the review of birds:

> "And he reviewed the birds, then said: How is it I do not see Hudhud, or is it that he is one of the absentees?" — 27:20

But the reason for this mention seems to be that the man so named was an officer of the intelligence department of Solomon's army. All that is related of him in the verses that follow clearly shows him to be a man and not a bird. He brings to Solomon news about

[10a] 27:18. [10b] Arabic lexicon *Tāj al-'Arūs.*

[11] The Arabic lexicon *Qāmūs* says under the word *barq*: "Abriqa is of the waters of Namlah."

[12] 1 Kings 20:1.

the Queen of Sheba, whom he finds along with her people "adoring the sun instead of God" and doing many unrighteous things: "And the devil has made their deeds seem good to them and turned them from the way, so they do not go aright".[13] Only a human being could judge what a false belief or a wicked deed was; it is beyond the ken of a bird.

After receiving a letter from Solomon,[14a] the Queen of Sheba at first sends to him a present which he considers as an affront and he threatens to attack her territory.[14b] She submits to Solomon and comes to him, and is asked to "enter the palace" which means that she became his wife. In the palace, water ran under glass, which the queen mistook for water itself. Solomon told her that it was not water that she was about to step into: "Surely it is a palace made smooth with glass".[14c] Thus did he make her realize her error in worshipping the sun. Like the glass, the sun was only an outward object, while the real source of life and power was God, which was manifested through such objects. It is then that the queen believes in God and gives up the worship of visible objects.

Solomon is again mentioned in connection with the destruction of the city of Saba, or Sheba, in ch. 34. Here we are told:

> "And (We made) the wind (subservient) to Solomon; it made a month's journey in the morning and a month's journey in the evening…" — 34:12

In 21:81 the words are:

> "And to Solomon (We subdued) the wind blowing violent, pursuing its course by His command to the land which We had blessed…"

The reference in both places is to Solomon's fleet which ran between the gulf of Aqaba and Ophir on the eastern coast of the

[13] 27:24.

[14a] 27:28–30. [14b] 27:37. [14c] 27:44.

Arabian peninsula, and brought him "fabulous amounts of gold and tropical products," according to the Jewish Encyclopaedia, giving him, "almost unlimited means for increasing the glory of his capital city and palace." This is referred to in what follows, in 34:12 and 13:

> "…and We made a fountain of molten brass to flow for him. And some of the jinn worked before him by the command of his Lord. … They made for him what he pleased, of synagogues and images, and bowls (large) as watering-troughs and fixed cooking-pots."

Yet, with all this glory, Solomon's death was also the death-knell of his kingdom:

> "But when We decreed death for him, nothing showed them his death but a creature of the earth that ate away his staff." — 34:14

It was his successor Rehoboam who was only "a creature of the earth that ate away his staff". The reference is to the life of ease and luxury which Rehoboam led, the eating away of the staff indicating the disruption of his kingdom. Elsewhere we are told:

> "And certainly We tried Solomon, and We put on his throne a (mere) body, so he turned (to Allah). He said: My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom which is not fit for anyone after me; surely You are the Great Giver." — 38:34–35

Solomon's heir was "a mere body". When Solomon saw this, he turned to God and prayed for a kingdom which should not be in danger of being wasted by others — the spiritual kingdom. We are also told that Solomon had at heart no attraction towards the wealth and the good things of this life. When a number of well-bred and swift horses were brought to him, he said:

> "I love the good things on account of the remembrance of my Lord." — 38:32

Job (Ayyūb)

Of the other Biblical prophets, Job is mentioned four times. The longest notice of him is 38:41–44, which is very probably an account of his flight from one place to another, for, when he complains of toil and torment, he is urged to go on further — a lesson not to despair under difficulties. He is also spoken of as being given "his people and more like them with them," which signifies that he was brought back to his family and was blessed with more children. A similar statement occurs in 21:83–84. In the account in the Quran the forty-two chapters of the book of Job in the Bible are condensed into perhaps as many words, and with more effect:

> "Surely We found him patient; most excellent the servant! Surely he (ever) turned (to Us)." — 38:44

Jonah (Yūnus)

References to Jonah are more frequent and he is mentioned in one of the earliest revelations:

> "So wait patiently for the judgment of your Lord, and do not be like the Companion of the fish, when he cried while he was in distress." — 68:48

The Holy Prophet is here told to bear persecution patiently and not to be like Jonah, who is called "the Companion of the fish". The whole is explained in another early revelation, 37:139–148, probably later than that referred to above. Jonah flies from his people, and 68:48 above shows that he fled before he received the Divine commandment to fly. He comes to a boat and is cast into the river. A fish draws him into his mouth.[15] The word used by the Holy Quran in 37:142, *iltaqama*, does not necessarily mean 'devoured'. There is no mention of his remaining in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. All that is said is:

[15] See 37: 140–142.

> "But if he had not been of those who glorify (Us), he would have remained in its belly till the day they are raised." — 37:143–144

i.e., he would have been devoured and would have met death in its belly. Apparently, therefore, he was not devoured by the fish. He was saved and sent to a hundred thousand people, as stated in 37:147. In 10:98 we are told that the people of Jonah believed in him and profited by their faith.

John the Baptist (Yaḥyā) and Zacharias (Zakariyya)

John the Baptist and his father, Zacharias, are mentioned twice at considerable length,[16*a*] and both these accounts are followed by an account of the birth of Jesus Christ. When Zacharias receives the news of the birth of a son, he wonders and is assured in words similar to those in which Mary wonders and is assured; but, unlike the statement in Luke 1:20, Zacharias is not struck dumb and there is no mention of unbelief on his part. On the other hand, as if to contradict Luke, it is related that he was ordered not to speak to people for three days, being otherwise in sound health,[16*b*] and the object of this silence is also made clear:

> "And remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and early morning." — 3:41

It may be added that in the Holy Quran Zacharias is expressly spoken of as a prophet and that John was a prophet is mentioned more than once.[16*c*] In the Bible, however, the Old Testament is brought to an end with Malachi, while the "New Dispensation" cannot admit of a prophet other than Jesus. Strangely enough, however, John is pronounced to be a prophet, in fact, "more than a prophet", and God's messenger, by Jesus Christ himself,[17] and thus the position is quite anomalous. Further, the angel Gabriel

[16*a*] 19:1–15 and 3:37–41. [16*b*] 19:10. [16*c*] 6:85, 3:39, 19:12.

[17] Matthew 11:9–10.

who brought revelation to prophets is spoken of as bringing revelation to Zacharias.[18] In fact, the anomaly is due to the supposition of a break in prophethood previous to the advent of Jesus, where actually there is none, as Jesus was only part of the chain of prophethood that extends from Moses to Jesus, the last link no doubt, as Moses was the first.

John the Baptist is, however, declared by the Gospel-writers to be greater than even Jesus Christ. He was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb", while the Holy Ghost did not descend upon Jesus until he was baptized by John.[19] Jesus says: "among them those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist",[20] and Jesus himself was undoubtedly born of a woman. Even the Holy Quran speaks of John in terms of great praise:

> "And We granted him wisdom when a child and kind-heartedness from Us and purity. And he was dutiful (to God), and kindly to his parents, and he was not insolent, disobedient." — 19:12–14

This shows clearly that, according to the Holy Qur'an, John was pure and sinless and never disobeyed God. It is not meant that other prophets were not as pure; in fact, what is said of one prophet is equally true of others.

Other prophets

Elias (Ilyās) is mentioned twice, once at some length, showing that he preached against the worship of Bal or the sun-god.[21] Elisha (Al-Yasa') is mentioned once only by name:

[18] Luke 1:19.

[19] Luke 1:15 and Matthew 3:16.

[20] Matthew 11:11.

[21] 37:123–132; see also 6:85.

> "and Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot; and each one (of them) We made to excel the people" — 6:86

Joshua is not mentioned by name, but is referred to along with Caleb, as: "Two men of those who feared, on whom Allah had bestowed a favour…".[22] The prophet Samuel is also not mentioned by name, but is referred to as "their prophet".[23]

In the Bible the prophet Daniel's vision is mentioned in which he saw a ram having two horns, and he was made to understand the meaning that the ram represented the kingdoms of Media and Persia.[24] The Quran refers to this in the story of Dhu-l-Qarnain, which also means 'the two-horned one', in 18:83–101.

The Bible also relates the vision of the prophet Ezekiel in which he saw dry bones in the middle of a valley, and he was made to prophesy that the bones would become a living body.[25] The Quran refers to this vision as follows:

> "Or like him who passed by a town, and it had fallen in upon its roofs. He said: When will Allah give it life after its death? … And look at the bones, how We set them together then clothe them with flesh." — 2:259

Dhu-l-Kifl, mentioned in the Quran, is probably Ezekiel.[26]

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[22] 5:23; see the Book of Numbers, 14:6–9.

[23] 2:246–248.

[24] Daniel, 8:3 and 8:20.

[25] Ezekiel, 37:1–14.

[26] 21:85 and 38:48.

Editor's Note: Dhul-i-Kifl may also be the Gautama Buddha. He was from Kapilvastu, and this name consists of *Kapil* and *Vastu*, meaning the town of Kapil. The name Kapil would be represented in Arabic as Kifl since the letter *p* of other languages is represented in Arabic by *f*.

PART 4 — MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING TEACHINGS OF THE QURAN

4.1: Liberal View of other religions

Faith in all prophets

There is a very general and very deep-rooted misconception that the Quran preaches intolerance, and that Muhammad preached his faith with the sword in one hand and the Quran in the other. Misrepresentation could go no further. The basic principle of Islam, a faith in all the prophets of the world, is enough to give the lie to this allegation. The great and liberal mind that preached not only love and respect for the founders of the great religions of the world but much more than that, faith in them, could not shrink to the narrowness of intolerance for those very religions. Tolerance is not, in fact, the word that can sufficiently indicate the breadth of the attitude of Islam towards other religions. It preaches equal love for all, equal respect for all, and equal faith in all.

No Compulsion in Religion

Again, intolerance could not be ascribed to a book which altogether excludes compulsion from the sphere of religion. It lays down in the clearest words.

"There is no compulsion in religion." — 2:256

In fact, the Holy Quran is full of statements showing that belief in this or that religion is a person's own concern, and that he

is given the choice of adopting one way or another: that, if he accepts truth, it is for his own good, and that, if he sticks to error, it is to his own detriment. I give below a few of these quotations:

> "We have truly shown him the way; he may be thankful or unthankful." — 76:3
>
> "The Truth is from your Lord; so whoever wishes, let him believe, and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve." — 18:29
>
> "Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord: so whoever sees, it is for the good of his own soul; and whoever is blind, it is to its harm." — 6:104
>
> "If you do good, you do good for your own souls. And if you do evil, it is for them." — 17:7

Why fighting was allowed

The Muslims were allowed to fight indeed, but what was the object? Not to compel the unbelievers to accept Islam, for it was against all the broad principles in which they had hitherto been brought up. No, it was to establish religious freedom, to stop all religious persecution, to protect the houses of worship of all religions, mosques among them. Here are a few quotations:

> "And if Allah did not repel some people by others, surely cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down." — 22:40
>
> "And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is only for Allah." — 2:193
>
> "And fight them until there is no more persecution, and all religions are for Allah." — 8:39

The words *religion is only for Allah* and *all religions are for Allah* carry one and the same significance: that religion is treated as a matter between man and God, a matter of conscience, in which

nobody has a right to interfere, so that there is no persecution on the score of religion and everyone is at liberty to hold any belief which he likes.

Under what conditions was the permission to fight given to the Muslims? Every student of Islamic history knows that the Holy Prophet and his companions were subjected to the severest persecution, as Islam began to gain ground at Makkah; over a hundred of them fled to Abyssinia, but persecution grew still more relentless. Ultimately, the Muslims had to take refuge in Madinah, but they were not left alone even there, and the sword was taken up by the enemy to annihilate Islam and the Muslims. The Quran bears express testimony to this:

> "Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And Allah is able to assist them — those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah." — 22:39–40

Later, the express condition was laid down:

> "And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but be not aggressive. Surely Allah does not love the aggressors." — 2:190

The Quran, therefore, allowed fighting only to save a persecuted community from powerful oppressors, and hence the condition was laid down that fighting was to be stopped as soon as persecution ceased:

> "But if they cease, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. And fight them until there is no persecution…" — 2:192–193

If the enemy offered peace, peace was to be accepted, though the enemy's intention might be only to deceive the Muslims:

> "And if they incline to peace, you (must) incline to it also, and trust in Allah. Surely He is the Hearer, the Knower. And if they intend to deceive you, then surely Allah is sufficient for you." — 8:61–62

The Holy Prophet made treaties of peace with his enemies; one such treaty brought about the famous truce of Hudaibiyah, the terms of which were not only disadvantageous, but also humiliating to the Muslims. According to the terms of this treaty "if an unbeliever, being converted to Islam, went over to the Muslims, he was to be returned, but if a Muslim went over to the unbelievers, he was not to be given back to the Muslims". This clause of the treaty cuts at the root of all allegations of the use of force by the Holy Prophet. It also shows the strong conviction of the Holy Prophet that neither would Muslims go back to unbelief, nor would the new converts to Islam be deterred from embracing Islam because the Prophet gave them no shelter. And these expectations proved true, for while not a single Muslim deserted Islam, a large number came over to Islam, and, being refused shelter at Madinah, formed a colony of their own in neutral territory.

It is a mistake to suppose that the conditions related above were abrogated at any time. The condition to fight "against those who fight against you" remained in force to the last. The last expedition led by the Holy Prophet was the famous Tabuk expedition, and every historian of Islam knows that, though the Prophet had marched a very long distance to Tabuk at the head of an army of thirty thousand, yet, when he found that the enemy did not fulfil the condition laid down above, he returned, and did not allow his troops to attack the enemy territory.

In the latest revelation on this subject, in chapter 9, *The Immunity*, there is not even a single direction that goes against this condition. The opening verse of that chapter speaks expressly of:

> "… those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement." — 9:1

and then the following exception is made:

> "except those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement, then they have not failed you in anything and have not backed up anyone against you." — 9:4

This shows clearly that the "immunity" related only to such idolatrous tribes as had first made agreements with the Muslims and then, violating them, killed and persecuted the Muslims wherever they found them, as stated there expressly:

> "They respect neither ties of relationship nor covenant in the case of a believer." — 9:10

Such people are also spoken of in an earlier revelation:

> "Those with whom you make an agreement, then they break their agreement every time, and they do not keep their duty." — 8:56

Further on, in chapter 9, the condition of the enemy attacking the Muslims first is plainly repeated:

> "Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first?" — 9:13

So from first to last, the Holy Quran allowed fighting only against those who fought the Muslims first; it allowed expressly only fighting in defence without which the Muslims could not live and it clearly forbade aggressive war. The waging of war on unbelievers to compel them to accept Islam is a myth pure and simple, a thing unknown to the Holy Quran. It was the enemy that waged war on the Muslims to turn them away from their religion, as the Holy Book so clearly asserts:

> "And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can." — 2:217

Relations of friendship with others

It is sometimes asserted that the Quran forbids relations of friendship with the followers of other religions. How could a Book which allows a man to have as his comrade in life a woman following another religion, as plainly stated in 5:5, say in the same breath that no friendly relations can be had with the followers of other religions? The loving relation of husband and wife is the friendliest of all relations and, when this is expressly permitted, there is not the least reason to suppose that other friendly relations are forbidden.

The fact is that, wherever there is prohibition against making friends with other people, it relates only to the people who were at war with the Muslims, and this is plainly stated in the Quran:

> "Allah does not forbid you, with regard to those who do not fight you for religion, nor drive you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly. Surely Allah loves the doers of justice. Allah forbids you only with regard to those who fight you for religion, and drive you forth from your homes and help (others) in your expulsion, that you make friends of them; and whoever makes friends of them, these are the wrongdoers." — 60:8–9

No punishment for apostasy

Another widely prevailing misconception may also be noted here. It is generally thought that the Quran provides a death sentence for those who desert the religion of Islam. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Quran will see that there is not the least ground for such a supposition. The Quran speaks repeatedly of people going back to unbelief after believing, but never once does it say that they should be killed or punished. I give here a few quotations:

> "And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever — these it is whose deeds are fruitless in this world and the Hereafter." — 2:217

> "O you who believe, if anyone of you should turn back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him…" — 5:54
>
> "Those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in disbelief, their repentance is not accepted, and these are they that go astray." — 3:90
>
> "Those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them nor guide them in the (right) way." — 4:137

On the other hand, the Quran in 3:72 speaks of a plan of the Jews to adopt Islam first and then desert it, thus creating the impression that Islam was not a religion worth having. Such a scheme could never have been conceived by them while living at Madinah, where the Government was Muslim, if apostasy, according to the Quranic law, were punishable with death. The misconception seems to have arisen from the fact that people who, after becoming apostates, joined the enemy, were treated as enemies, or that, where an apostate took the life of a Muslim, he was put to death, not for changing his religion, but for committing murder.

4.2: The Position of Woman

Spiritually woman raised to the position of man

This is another subject on which great misunderstanding prevails. The belief that, according to the Quran, woman has no soul is almost general in the West. Probably it took hold of the mind of Europe at a time when Europeans had no access to the Quran. No other religious book and no other reformer has done one-tenth of what the Holy Quran or the Holy Prophet Muhammad has done to raise the position of woman. Read the Quran and you find good and righteous women being given the same position as good and righteous men. Both sexes are spoken of in the same terms. The highest favour which God has bestowed upon man is the gift of Divine revelation, and we find women, to whom Divine revelation came, spoken of along with men:

> "And We revealed to Moses' mother, saying: Suckle him; then when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear, nor grieve; surely We shall bring him back to you and make him a messenger." — 28:7
>
> "When We revealed to your mother (i.e. Moses' mother) what was revealed." — 20:38
>
> "And when the angels said: O Mary, surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the world." — 3:42

Further, where the Holy Quran speaks of the great prophets of God, saying: "And mention Abraham in the Book", "And mention Moses in the Book", and so on, it speaks of a woman in exactly

the same terms: "And mention Mary in the Book".[1] No other religious book has given such a high spiritual position to woman.

The Quran makes no difference between man and woman in the bestowal of reward for the good he or she does:

> "So their Lord accepted their prayer, (saying): I will not let the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female; each of you is as the other." [2] — 3:195
>
> "And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and is a believer — these will enter the Garden, and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least." — 4:124
>
> "Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall certainly make him live a good life, and We shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did." — 16:97
>
> "…and whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, these shall enter the Garden, to be given sustenance in it without measure." — 40:40

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[1] For Abraham, see 19:41, for Moses see 19:51, and for Mary see 19:16.

[2] *Editor's Note:* This verse states clearly that women's prayers are accepted by God exactly as the same prayers said by men are accepted by God. The persons whose prayers are mentioned here are described earlier as "those who have understanding, those who remember Allah, standing and sitting and (lying) on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth" (3:190–191). These earlier verses together with 3:195 quoted here show that, not only men, but equally women also possess the intellectual powers of understanding and reflection.

Elsewhere, the Quran mentions the prayer of Mary's mother for her unborn child: "My Lord, I vow to You what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Your service), so accept (it) from me" (3:35). This prayer was accepted by God, even though the child born was female. After her birth, her mother prayed further: "I commend her and her offspring into Your protection from the accursed devil" (3:36), and this too was accepted — a prayer by a woman for another woman. In an incident of the Holy Prophet Muhammad's life, a woman complained to him about her husband's treatment, and Allah heard her: "Allah indeed has heard the plea of her who pleads with you about her husband and complains to Allah; and Allah hears the contentions of both of you" (58:1).

The Quran, speaking of good women alongside of good men, enumerates every good quality as being possessed by women exactly as it is possessed by men:

> "Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their (own) chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember — Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward." — 33:35

For women too, like men, Allah has prepared "forgiveness and a mighty reward." With God, therefore, according to the Quran, there is no difference between men and women, and morally and spiritually they can rise to the same eminence.

Woman is the equal of man in rights of property

On the material side, too, we find no difference, except what nature requires for its own ends. A woman can earn, inherit and own property and dispose of it just as a man can, and the Holy Quran is explicit on all these points:

> "For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn." — 4:32

> "For men is a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and for women a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave…" — 4:7

> "And give women (i.e., your wives) their dowries as a free gift. But if they (the women) of themselves are pleased to give you a portion from it, consume it with enjoyment and pleasure." — 4:4

Woman, in Arabia, had no rights of property; nay, she herself was part of the inheritance, and was taken possession of along with other property. She had no right to the property of her deceased husband or father. The Quran took her from this low position and raised her to a position of perfect freedom as regards her property rights and her right to inheritance, a position which, among other nations, she has only partly attained and that after centuries of hard struggle. [3]

Polygamy

It is, however, asserted that polygamy and the seclusion of women, as enjoined in the Holy Quran, have done more harm to woman than the benefit conferred on her by bestowal of property rights. The fact is that a great misunderstanding exists on these two points. Monogamy is the rule in Islam and polygamy only an exception allowed subject to certain conditions. The following two verses are the only authority for the sanction of polygamy, and let us see how far they carry us:

> "And if you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice, then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess. This is more proper that you may not do injustice." — 4:3
>
> "And they ask you a decision about women. Say: Allah makes known to you His decision concerning them; and what is recited to you in the Book is concerning widowed women, whom you do not give what is appointed for

[3] *Editor's Note:* In connection with 4:4 quoted above (p. 160), the next verse, 4:5, says: "And do not make over your property, which Allah has made a (means of) support for you, to the weak of understanding, and maintain them out of it…". Since 4:4 requires that wives must be given property and given control over it, this shows that women in general are not "weak of understanding" but are recognised by the Quran as having full mental capacity. The next verse, 4:6, relates to bringing up orphans and says that, when they reach adulthood, "if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property…". This, again, shows that as wives are to be given property, it follows that they have maturity of intellect.

them, while you are not inclined to marry them…" — 4:127

Now the first of these verses allows polygamy on the express condition that "you cannot do justice to orphans", and what is meant is made clear by the second verse, which contains a clear reference to the first verse in the words, "what is recited to you in the Book is concerning widowed women". The Arabs were guilty of a double injustice to widows: they did not give them and their children a share in the inheritance of their husbands, nor were they inclined to marry widows who had children, because the responsibility for the maintenance of the children would in that case devolve upon them. The Quran remedied both these evils; it gave a share of inheritance to the widow with a share also for the orphans, and it commended the taking of such widows in marriage, and allowed polygamy expressly for this purpose.

It should, therefore, be clearly understood that monogamy is the rule in Islam and polygamy is allowed only as a remedial measure, and that, not for the sake of the man, but for the sake of the widow and her children. This permission was given at a time when the wars, which were forced on the Muslims, had decimated the men, so that many widows and orphans were left for whom it was necessary to provide. A provision was made in the form of polygamy so that the widow should find a home and protector and the orphans should have paternal care and affection. Perhaps the only other way is prostitution, which prevails widely, and where the law of the country does not recognize it, it is recognized in practice. Nature will have its course, and allowing illicit intercourse is the only other alternative to a limited polygamy.

Seclusion

As regards the seclusion of women, the Quran never prohibited women from going out of their houses for their needs. In the time of the Prophet, women went regularly to mosques, and said their prayers along with men, standing in a separate row. They also joined their husbands in the labour of the field; they even went

with the army to the field of battle, and looked after the wounded, removing them from the field, if necessary, and helped fighting-men in many other ways. They could even fight the enemy in an emergency. No occupation was prohibited to them, and they could do any work they chose. The only restrictions on their liberty are contained in the following verses:

> "Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears of it. And they should wear their head-coverings over their bosoms." — 24:30–31

Now the real restriction contained in these verses is that both men and women should, when they meet each other, cast down their looks, but there is an additional restriction in the case of women that *they should not display their adornment* with the exception of "what appears of it". The exception has been explained as meaning "what is customary and natural to uncover". That women went to mosques with their faces uncovered is recognized on all hands, and there is also a saying of the Holy Prophet that, when a woman reaches the age of puberty, she should cover her body *except the face and the hands.* The majority of the commentators are also of opinion that the exception relates to the face and the hands.[4]

Hence, while a display of beauty is forbidden, the restriction does not interfere with the necessary activities of woman. She can do any work that she likes to earn her livelihood, for the Holy Quran says plainly, as already quoted, that women shall have the

[4] *Editor's Note:* Another verse in this connection is as follows: "And (as for) women past childbearing, who do not hope for marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their (outer) clothes without displaying their adornment. And if they are modest, it is better for them" (24:60).

benefit of *what they earn*. A limited seclusion and a limited polygamy do not, therefore, interfere with the necessary activities of woman; they are both meant for her protection and as preventives against loose sexual relations, which ultimately undermine society.

4.3: The Theory of Abrogation

Alleged basis of abrogation

That certain verses of the Holy Quran are abrogated by others is now an exploded theory. The two passages on which it was supposed to rest refer, really, to the abrogation, not of the passages of the Holy Quran, but of the previous revelations whose place the Holy Quran has taken. The first verse is contained in the chapter *al-Nahl* — a Makkah revelation — and runs thus:

> "And when We change a message for a message[1] — and Allah knows best what He reveals — they say: You are only a forger. … And indeed We know that they say: Only a mortal teaches him." — 16:101, 103

Now it is a fact admitted on all hands that details of the Islamic law were revealed at Madinah, and it is in relation to these details that the theory of abrogation has been broached. Therefore a Makkah revelation would not speak of abrogation. But the reference in the above verse is to the abrogation, not of the Quranic verses, but of the previous Divine messages or revelations, involved by the revelation of the Holy Quran. The context shows this clearly to be the case, for the opponents are here made to say that the Prophet was a forger. Now the opponents called the Prophet a forger, not because he announced the abrogation of

[1] The word *āyah* occurring here means originally 'a sign', and hence it comes to signify an indication or evidence or proof, and is used in the sense of a miracle. It also signifies *risālah* or a Divine message. The word is frequently used in the Holy Quran in its general sense of a Divine message or a Divine communication, and is, therefore, applicable to a portion of the Holy Quran or to any previous revelation. It carries the latter significance here as the context clearly shows.

certain verses of the Holy Quran, but because he claimed that the Holy Quran was a Divine revelation which had taken the place of previous revelations. Their contention was that the Quran was not a revelation at all: "Only a mortal teaches him." Thus they called the whole of the Quran a forgery and not merely a particular verse of it. The theory of abrogation, therefore, cannot be based on this verse which speaks only of one revelation or one law taking the place of another.

The other verse which is supposed to lend support to the theory is the following:

> "Whatever message We abrogate or cause to be forgotten,[2] We bring one better than it or one like it." — 2:106

A reference to the context will show that the Jews or the followers of previous revelations are here addressed. Of these it is said again and again:

> "We believe in what was revealed to us. And they deny what is besides that…" — 2:91

So they were told that if one revelation was abrogated, it was only to give place to a better. And there is mention not only of abrogation but also of something that was forgotten. Now the words "or cause to be forgotten" cannot refer to the Holy Quran at all, because no portion of the Holy Book could be said to have been forgotten so as to require a new revelation in its place. There is no point in supposing that God should first make the Holy Prophet forget a verse and then reveal a new one in its place. Why not, if he really had forgotten a verse, remind him of the one forgotten?

[2] The translation of the words "cause to be forgotten" (*nunsi-hā*) in the translations of the Quran by George Sale, E.H. Palmer and J.M. Rodwell is "cause thee to forget". This is misleading. The text does not contain any word meaning *thee* (i.e. the singular of *you*). The slight error makes the verse mean that Almighty God had caused the Holy Prophet to forget certain Quranic verses; whereas the original does not say that the Prophet was made to forget anything but clearly implies that the world was made to forget.

Even if we suppose that his memory ever failed in retaining a certain verse (which really never happened), that verse was quite safely preserved in writing, and the mere failure of the memory could not necessitate a new revelation. That the Prophet never forgot what was recited to him by the Holy Spirit is plainly stated in the Holy Quran:

> "We shall make you recite, so you shall not forget…" — 87:6

History also bears out the fact that he never forgot any portion of the Quranic revelation. Sometimes the whole of a very long chapter would be revealed to him in one portion, as in the case of the sixth chapter which extends over twenty sections, but he would cause it to be written down without delay, and make his Companions learn it by heart, and recite it in public prayers, and that without the change of even a letter; despite the fact that he himself could not read from a written copy; nor did the written copies, as a rule, remain in his possession. It was a miracle indeed that he never forgot any portion of the Quran, though other things he might forget, and it is to his forgetfulness in other things that the words "except what Allah pleases" in the next verse refer. On the other hand, it is a fact that parts of the older revelation had been utterly lost and forgotten, and thus the Holy Quran was needed to take the place of that which was abrogated, and that which had been forgotten by the world.

Hadith on abrogation

The theory of abrogation has been accepted by writer after writer without ever thinking that not a single hadith, however weak, touching on the abrogation of a verse, was traceable to the Holy Prophet. It never occurred to the upholders of this theory that the Quranic verses were promulgated by the Holy Prophet, and that it was he whose authority was necessary for the abrogation of any Quranic verse; no Companion, not even Abu Bakr or Ali, could say that a Quranic verse was abrogated. The Holy Prophet alone

was entitled to say so, and there is not a single hadith to the effect that he ever said so; it is always some Companion or a later authority to whom such views are to be traced. In most cases where a report is traceable to one Companion who held a certain verse to have been abrogated, there is another report traceable to another Companion to the effect that that verse was not abrogated.[3] It shows clearly that the opinion of one Companion as to the abrogation of a verse would be questioned by another Companion.

Even among later writers we find that there is not a single verse on which the verdict of abrogation has been passed by one without being questioned by another; and while there are writers who would lightly pass the verdict of abrogation on hundreds of verses, there are others who consider not more than five to be abrogated, and even in the case of these five the verdict of abrogation has been seriously impugned by earlier writers.

The theory of abrogation has in fact arisen from a misconception of the use of the word *naskh* by the Companions of the Holy Prophet. When the significance of one verse was limited by another, it was sometimes spoken of as having been abrogated (*nusikhat*) by that other. Similarly when the words of a verse gave rise to a misconception, and a later revelation cleared up that misconception, the word *naskh* was metaphorically used in connection with it, the idea underlying its use being, not that the first verse was abrogated, but that a certain conception to which it had given rise was abrogated. (See the note at the end of this chapter, p. 173.)

Earlier authorities admit this use of the word:

[3] Some examples may be noted here. 2:180 is held by some to have been abrogated while others have denied it; 2:184 is considered by Ibn Umar as having been abrogated while Ibn Abbas says it was not (see Bukhari, book 65, h. 4506 and h. 4505 on *Sūrah* 2, v. 184); 2:240 was abrogated according to Ibn Zubair while Mujahid says it was not (see Bukhari, book 65, h. 4530 on *Sūrah* 2, v. 240, and h. 4531 on v. 234). I have taken these examples only from the second chapter of the Holy Quran.

> "Those who accept *naskh* (abrogation) here (2:109) take it as meaning explanation metaphorically."

and again:

> "By *naskh* is meant metaphorically, explaining and making clear the significance." [4]

It is an abrogation but not an abrogation of the words of the Holy Quran; rather it is the abrogation of a misconception of their meaning. This is further made clear by the application *naskh* to verses containing statement of facts (*akhbār*), whereas, properly speaking, abrogation could only take place in the case of verses containing a commandment or a prohibition (*amr* or *nahy*). In the ordinary sense of the word there could be no abrogation of a statement made in the Word of God, as that would suggest that God had made a wrong statement first and then recalled it. This use of the word *naskh* by the earlier authorities regarding statements shows that they were using the word to signify the removal of a wrong conception regarding, or the placing of a limitation upon, the meaning of a certain verse. At the same time, it is true that the use of the word *naskh* soon became indiscriminate, and when anyone found himself unable to reconcile two verses, he would declare one of them to be abrogated by the other.

Basis of abrogation

The principle on which the theory of abrogation is based is unacceptable, being contrary to the plain teachings of the Holy Quran. A verse is considered to be abrogated by another when the two cannot be reconciled with each other; in other words, when they appear to contradict each other. But the Holy Quran destroys this foundation when it declares in plain words that no part of the Holy Book is at variance with another:

[4] *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* by Mahmud Al-Alusi, vol. 1, p. 292 and 508.

> "Will they not then meditate on the Quran? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy." — 4:82

It was due to lack of meditation that one verse was thought to be at variance with another; and hence it is that in almost all cases, where abrogation has been upheld by one person, there has been another who being able to reconcile the two, has repudiated the alleged abrogation.

Suyuti on abrogation

It is only among the later commentators that we meet with the tendency to augment the number of verses thought to have been abrogated, and by some of these the figure has been placed as high as five hundred. Speaking of such Suyuti says in the *Itqān:*

> "Those who multiply (the number of abrogated verses) have included many kinds — one kind being that in which there is neither abrogation nor any particularization (of a general statement), nor has it any connection with any one of them, for various reasons. And this is as in the word of God: 'And spend out of what We have given them' (2:3); 'And spend out of what We have given you' (63:10); and the like. It is said that these are abrogated by the verse dealing with *Zakāt*, while it is not so, they being still in force."

Suyuti himself brings the number of verses which he thinks to be abrogated down to twenty-one,[5] in some of which he considers there is abrogation, while in others he finds that it is only the particularization of a general injunction that is effected by a later verse; but he admits that there is a difference of opinion even about these.

A later writer, however, the famous Shah Waliullah of India, commenting on this in his *al-Fauz al-Kabīr* says that abrogation cannot be proved in the case of sixteen out of Suyuti's twenty-one

[5] *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* by Jalal-ud-Din Suyuti, vol. 2, p. 22 and 23.

verses, but in the case of the remaining five he is of opinion that the verdict of abrogation is final.[6] These five verses are dealt with below.

1. "It is prescribed for you, when death approaches one of you, if he leaves behind wealth for parents and near relatives, to make a bequest in a kindly manner; it is incumbent upon the dutiful." — 2:180

As a matter of fact, both Baidawi and Ibn Jarir quote authorities who state that this verse was not abrogated; and it is surprising that it is considered as being abrogated by 4:11–12, which speak of the shares to be given "after (payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt," showing clearly that the bequest spoken of in 2:180 was still in force. This verse in fact speaks of bequest for charitable objects which is even now recognized by Muslims to the extent of one-third of property.

2. "And those of you who die and leave wives behind, should make a bequest in favour of their wives of maintenance for a year without turning them out." — 2:240

But we have the word of no less an authority than Mujahid that this verse is not abrogated:

> "Allah gave her (i.e., the widow) the whole of a year, seven months and twenty days being optional, under the bequest; if she desired she could stay according to the bequest (i.e., having maintenance and residence for a year), and if she desired she could leave the house (and remarry), as the Quran says: 'without turning them out. Then if they themselves go away, there is no blame on you'." [7]

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[6] *Editor's Note:* Shah Waliullah writes: "according to my views as expressed in my writings abrogation cannot be determined but in five verses only" (*Al-Fauz al-Kabīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr,* English translation by G.N. Jalbani, National Hijra Council, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1985, ch. 2, p. 38).

[7] Bukhari, book 65: *Tafsīr* (Interpretation of the Quran), hadith 4531.

This verse, therefore, does not contradict verse 234. Moreover, there is proof that it was revealed after verse 234 and hence it cannot be said to have been abrogated by that verse.

3. "If there are of you twenty steadfast, they shall overcome two hundred…" — 8:65

This is said to have been abrogated by the verse that follows it:

> "Now Allah has lightened your burden and He knows that there is weakness in you. So if there are of you a hundred steadfast, they shall overcome two hundred…" — 8:66

That the question of abrogation does not arise here at all is apparent from the words of the second verse which clearly refers to the early times when the Muslims were weak, having neither munitions of war nor experience of warfare, and when old and young had to go out and fight; while the first verse refers to a later period when the Muslim armies were fully organized and equipped.

4. "It is not allowed to you (O Prophet) to take wives after this…" — 33:52

This is said to have been abrogated by a verse which was apparently revealed before it:

> "O Prophet! We have made lawful to you your wives…" — 33:50

The whole issue has been turned topsy-turvy. As I have said before, a verse cannot be abrogated by one revealed before it. Apparently what happened was this. When 4:3 was revealed, allowing up to four wives, should exceptional circumstances require, and limiting the number of wives to four, the Prophet was told not to divorce the excess number, and this was effected by 33:50 as quoted above; but at the same time he was told not to take any woman in marriage after that, and this was done by 33:52.

5. "O you who believe, when you consult the Messenger, offer something in charity before your consultation. That is

> better for you and purer. But if you do not have (the means), then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." — 58:12

This is said to have been abrogated by the verse that follows:

> "Do you fear that you will not (be able to) give in charity before your consultation? So when you do not do it, and Allah has turned to you (mercifully), keep up prayer and give the due (obligatory) charity…" — 58:13

It is not easy to see how one of these injunctions is abrogated by the other, since there is not the slightest difference in what they say. The second verse merely gives further explanation to show that the injunction is only in the nature of a recommendation, that is to say, you may give in charity whatever you can easily spare, the only obligatory charity being *Zakāt*.

Thus the theory of abrogation falls to the ground on all considerations.

Note on use of *naskh* to mean removal of misconception

(This is the note referred to on p. 168. In the original book by Maulana Muhammad Ali the detailed discussion below was in the main text.)

There are many instances of the use of the word *naskh* (abrogation) to mean that a verse removed a misconception about another verse or limited its significance.

In 2:284, it is said: "Whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it;" while according to 2:286, "Allah does not impose on any soul a duty beyond its ability." A report in Bukhari says that one of the Companions of the Holy Prophet, probably Abdullah ibn Umar, held the opinion that the first verse was abrogated *(nusikhat)* by the second (book 65, ch. 54, hadith 4545). What was meant by *naskh* in this case is made clear by another detailed report given in the *Musnad* of Ahmad. According to this report when 2:284 was revealed, "the Companions entertained an idea which they had never entertained before (or according to another report, they were greatly grieved) and thought that they had not

the power to bear it. The matter being brought to the notice of the Holy Prophet, he said: 'Rather say, We hear and obey and submit', and so God inspired faith in their hearts." As this report shows, what happened was this, that some Companion or Companions thought that 2:284 imposed a new burden on them, making every evil idea which entered the mind without taking root or ever being translated into action, punishable in the same manner as if it had been translated into action. 2:286 made it plain that this was not the meaning conveyed by 2:284, since according to that verse, God did not impose on anyone a burden which he could not bear. This removal of a misconception was called abrogation (*nas<u>kh</u>*) by Ibn Umar.

It may be added that there is nothing to show that 2:286 was revealed later than 2:284. On the other hand, the use of the words "we hear and obey" by the Holy Prophet to remove the wrong notion which some Companions entertained — these very words occur in 2:285 — shows that the three verses, 284, 285 and 286, were all revealed together, and hence the abrogation, in the ordinary sense of the word, of one of them by another is meaningless.

There are other instances in which a verse revealed later is thought to have been abrogated by a previous verse. But how could a later verse be abrogated by a previous one? Or what point can there be in giving an order which was cancelled before it was given? If, on the other hand, the word *nas<u>kh</u>* is taken to mean the placing of a limitation upon the meaning of a verse, or the removal of a wrong conception attached to it, no difficulty would arise, for even a previous verse may be spoken of as placing a limitation upon the meaning of a later verse or as removing a wrong conception arising therefrom.

Another example of one statement being spoken of as abrogated by another is furnished by 8:65–66, where the first verse states that in war the Muslims shall overcome ten times their numbers, and the second, after referring to their weakness at the time — which meant the paucity of trained men among them and their lack of the implements and necessaries of war — states that they shall overcome double their numbers. Now the two verses relate to two different conditions and they may be said to place a limitation upon the meaning of each other, but one of them cannot be spoken of as abrogating the other. In the time of the Holy Prophet when the Muslims were weak, whenever man, old or young, had to be called upon to take the field, and the Muslim army was but ill-equipped, the Muslims overcame double, even three times, their numbers; but in the wars with the Persian and Roman empires, they vanquished ten times their numbers. Both statements were true; they only related to different circumstances and the one placed a limitation upon the meaning of the other, but neither of them actually abrogated the other.

PART 5 — PURITY OF THE TEXT OF THE QURAN

Among all the religious books of the world, the Holy Quran is the only Book which enjoys the distinction of having a pure text. Every word and letter of the Holy Book, as we have it today, is as it left the lips of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to whom the Book was revealed, and it is for this reason that, through all the centuries since it was revealed and among all the Muslims from East to West, among the numerous contending sects, there is only one Quran. It is the only revealed Book in which one can have access, with the fullest certainty, to that Divine light which was revealed to the heart of a prophet of God. The factors which contributed to this safe preservation of the text are its being reduced to writing under the direction of the Prophet himself and its being committed to memory by a large number of people, at the time of its revelation.

5.1: Every portion of the Holy Quran was written as it was revealed

Writing known at Makkah

The first and the most important circumstance which assisted in the preservation of the text of the Holy Quran is that every verse of it was put into writing in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet before his own eyes. Writing was known at Makkah and Madinah before the advent of Islam, and though the Arabs generally relied upon a wonderfully retentive memory for the preservation of thousands of

verses and long lists of genealogies, yet they reduced to writing their more important compositions, and hung them in some public place where their compatriots could see and admire them. Hence their seven famous odes are known as *Al-Sab‘ al-Mu‘allaqāt — The Seven Suspended Ones*. These odes were so named from the circumstance that they were suspended in the Ka‘bah by their authors at the pilgrimage season as odes of unequalled poetic beauty, and there they remained placarded for some time.

Muir bears testimony to both facts, to writing being known at Makkah and Madinah, and to the Quran being written:

> “But there is good reason for believing that many fragmentary copies, embracing amongst them the whole Quran, or nearly the whole, were during his lifetime made by the Prophet’s followers. Writing was without doubt generally known at Mecca long before Muhammad assumed the prophetical office. And at Medina many of his followers were employed by the Prophet in writing his letters or despatches. … The poorer captives taken at Badr were offered their release on condition that they taught a certain number of Medina citizens to write. And although the people of Medina were not so generally educated as those of Mecca, yet many are noticed as having been able to write before Islam.” [1]

Internal evidence as to the writing of the Quran

The first thing we notice about the Holy Book is that there is a hint as to the use of the pen in the very first revelation that came to the Holy Prophet. The first five short sentences revealed to the Prophet were:

1. “Read in the name of your Lord Who creates —
2. Creates man from a clot (of blood),
3. Read and your Lord is most Generous,

[1] Muir’s *Life of Mohammad*, Intro., p. xix.

4. Who taught by the pen,
5. Taught man what he knew not." — 96:1–5

It is an established fact that the Prophet knew neither reading nor writing. Strange as it may appear, in the very first message that he received from On High, he is told not only to read but also to seek the help of the pen, which was the only means of the preservation of knowledge. It was due to this that from the very first he made arrangements to have every revelation reduced to writing as it came down to him, in addition to having committed it to memory, which he did by reading it out to those around him.

Moreover, the Holy Quran itself furnishes abundant evidence that it existed in a written form. It again and again calls itself a *kitāb*, which means *a book*, or *a writing which is complete in itself* (see 2:2 etc.). The Quran is also designated as *ṣuḥuf*, which means *written pages*:

> "… a Messenger from Allah, reciting pure pages, in which are right books." — 98:2

The *pure pages* are the pages of the Quran, and the right books are its chapters; for not only is the entire Quran called *al-Kitāb* or *the Book*, but its different chapters are also called *books*. Again:

> "No! surely it is a Reminder. So whoever wishes, let him be mindful of it. In honoured books, exalted, purified, in the hands of scribes, noble, virtuous." — 80:11–16

The word *ṣaḥīfah* (whose plural *ṣuḥuf* is used here, translated here as books) is the very word applied to the collection made by Zaid in the Caliphate of Abu Bakr and later in that of Uthman.

Thus we see that the Holy Quran describes itself in clear and unmistakable words both as a *kitāb* and as a *ṣaḥīfah*, words used in the Arabic language to denote a written book, a fact to which every dictionary of the Arabic language testifies. From the same root *ṣaḥaf* is derived the word *Muṣḥaf*, a name to this day applied to the Holy Quran, which means a book or a volume consisting of

a collection of *ṣaḥīfahs* or *written pages*. There are many other references in the Holy Quran showing that its chapters existed in a written form at an early date. Thus:

> "Surely it is a bountiful Quran, in a book that is protected, which none touches but the purified ones." — 56:77–79

The chapter in which these verses occur is one of the earliest revelations. Rodwell in his translation of the Quran gives the following footnote under this passage:

> "This passage implies the existence of copies of portions at least of the Koran in common use. It was quoted by the sister of Omar when, at his conversion, he desired to take her copy of Sura 20 into his hands. Verses 77, 78 were directed by the Caliph Muhammad Abulcasim ben Abd-allah to be inscribed on all copies of the Koran." [2]

It is an admitted fact that every portion of the Holy Quran was regarded with equal reverence by the Muslims, and every word of it was believed to be the Word of God. It is, therefore, quite unreasonable to suppose that some portions of the Holy Quran were written, while others were not. There is not a single circumstance in the whole history of Islam which can entitle us to make any such distinction between the different portions of the Holy Quran, and to suppose that while some chapters were written, others were not thought fit to be written, or that equal care was not taken of all the parts.

Again, it is in a chapter revealed at Makkah that we meet with the following challenge to the unbelievers:

> "Or, say they: He has forged it. Say: Then bring ten forged chapters like it, and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful." — 11:13

[2] Rev. J.M. Rodwell, *The Koran, Translated from the Arabic,* p. 54 (1876 edition). The last sentence, beginning "Verses 77, 78 were …", is not found in the first edition of 1861, nor in the later 1909 edition which was reprinted several times.

A similar challenge is contained in a chapter of a still earlier date:

> "Say: If people and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Quran, they could not bring the like of it, though they helped one another." — 17:88

And in a chapter revealed at Madinah we have:

> "And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful. But if you do not (do it)— and you can never do (it) — then be on your guard against the fire…" — 2:23–24

Now, all these challenges to the opponents to produce one *sūrah* or ten *sūrahs* like the Quran imply that the *sūrahs* of the Holy Quran existed in a written form at the time of the challenge; otherwise the challenge would have been meaningless.

Historical evidence as to the writing of the Quran

There are numerous anecdotes showing that when the Holy Prophet received a revelation, it was immediately reduced to writing. The general practice is thus described, by no less a personage than Uthman, the third Caliph whose name is in particular associated with the collection of the Quran and who, being one of the earliest converts to Islam, remained with the Prophet almost since the Call:

> "It was customary with the Messenger of Allah, when portions of different chapters were being revealed to him, that when any verse was revealed, he called one of those persons who used to write the Holy Quran and said to him: 'Write these verses in the chapter where such and such verses occur'." [3]

[3] Abu Dawud, book 2: Prayer, ch. 127, h. 786. Tirmidhi, book 47: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 10, h. 3086.

This report mentions, not what the Holy Prophet did on one occasion, but what he always used to do whenever any verse of the Holy Quran was revealed to him. Thus we have the clearest testimony that every verse of the Divine revelation was put into writing by the order and in the presence of the Holy Prophet, while additional care was taken by him to point out the place and chapter of a verse, when there were two or more unfinished chapters, so that the scribes might not confuse the verses of one chapter with those of another.

The Prophet's Scribes

Other reports of the highest authority support the evidence of Uthman. Thus Bukhari narrates under the heading *The Scribes of the Prophet*:

> "When the verse *lā yastawi-l-qā'idūn* … (4:95) was revealed, the Prophet (may peace and the blessing of Allah be upon him) said: 'Bring Zaid to me, and let him bring the tablet and the inkstand and the bone (for writing)'. Then he said to him (Zaid), 'Write *lā yastawi* …' (i.e., the verse revealed)." [4]

According to another report under the same heading, Abu Bakr sent for Zaid and said to him: "You used to write the revelation for the Messenger of Allah (peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him!)".[5] Besides Zaid, who did by far the greater part of the work of writing the revelations of the Holy Prophet at Madinah, many other persons are mentioned who did this work at Makkah and, in the absence of Zaid, at Madinah, including Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali.[6] In fact as many as forty-two of the Companions are related to have acted as scribes for the Holy Prophet.

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[4] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 4, h. 4990.

[5] Bukhari, book 65: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 20 under *Sūrah* 9, h. 4679.

[6] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 4: Scribes of the Prophet, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4990 (vol. 8, p. 639).

The importance given to the writing down of the revelations as they came down to the Prophet was so great that in the historic Flight of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah, pen, inkstand and writing material were among the essential necessities of the journey.

There was no paucity of scribes as besides the Holy Quran many other things were written. Some of the Companions used to write the words uttered by the Holy Prophet, which were generally reported only orally.[7] Letters were written by order of the Holy Prophet to several potentates.[8] The truce at Hudaibiyah was also written.[9] Correspondence was also kept up with the Jews in Hebrew.[10] Not only could men read and write, but even women were taught the art. Among the wives of the Holy Prophet, at least Aishah and Hafsah could read and write, as many reliable reports show. But it is not to be supposed that these were the only persons among the Companions who could write, or who actually transcribed copies of the Holy Quran. These were the men who performed the work of amanuenses for the Holy Prophet. There were many others who wrote copies of the Holy Quran for their own use.

Besides these reports, which directly establish the fact that every verse of the Holy Quran was written at the time of its revelation, there are many other anecdotes indirectly supporting the same conclusion. For instance, the Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

> "Do not write from me anything except the Quran." [11]

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[7] Bukhari, book 3: Knowledge, ch. 39, h. 111.

[8] Bukhari, book 64: Battles (of the Prophet), ch. 82, h. 4424.

[9] Bukhari, book 54: Conditions, ch. 15, h. 2731–2732.

[10] Bukhari, book 93: Judgments, ch. 40, h. 7195

[11] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 3: *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4988 (in 13 volume Cairo edition of 1986, see vol. 8, p. 629).

This direction, which was meant as a precautionary step against the confusion of the Holy Quran with what the Holy Prophet spoke on other occasions, takes it for granted that the Holy Quran was written. This conclusion is further corroborated by the circumstance that where there was no danger of confusion on the part of the writers, the writing of certain hadith was also allowed.[12]

There is another report mentioned by Ibn Hisham, in the story of the conversion of Umar, which shows that written copies of the chapters of the Holy Quran were in common use among the early Muslim converts at Makkah. Umar, with a drawn sword in his hand, one day left his house with the intention of murdering the Holy Prophet. On the way he learnt that his own sister and brother-in-law were secret converts to Islam. So he turned his steps to his sister's house:

> "At that time there was in the house a third man, Khabbāb, who had with him a book containing *Ṭā Hā* (ch. 20 of the Holy Quran), which he was teaching to Umar's sister and her husband. When they perceived Umar coming, Khabbāb hid himself in a corner of the house, and Fatimah, Umar's sister, took the book and hid it. But Umar had already so far approached them that he had heard the voice of Khabbāb reciting the Holy Quran. So the first question he asked, when he entered the house, was as to what they were reading. They replied: 'You have not heard anything'. He said, 'Yes, I have heard, and I have been informed that you have followed Muhammad in his religion'. Then he caught hold of his brother-in-law Sa'id, son of Zaid. His sister advanced towards him to protect her husband and was severely hurt in the struggle. Then Umar's sister and her husband told him that they were really converts to Islam and that he might do what he liked. When Umar saw his sister bleeding, he was sorry for what he had done, and asked her to let him have the book

[12] Bukhari, book 3: Knowledge, ch. 39, h. 111.

> which they had been reading, so that he might see what it was that Muhammad had brought to them. Umar himself could read and write. On hearing his demand, his sister expressed the fear that he might destroy the volume. Umar gave her his word, and swore by his idols that he would return the volume to her after perusing it. Then she told him that, being a *mushrik* (one who set up false gods with God), he was impure and could not touch the Quran, because there was a verse in it to the effect that none should touch it except the pure. Then Umar washed himself, and his sister handed over to him the book which had *Ṭā Hā* written in it. Umar read a portion of it, and began to admire it and showed a reverence for the book. Thereupon Khabbāb, seeing that he was well disposed towards Islam, asked him to accept Islam." [13]

This long quotation, which is a part of the lengthy report of the conversion of Umar, shows conclusively that at that early period copies of the Quran were commonly used by the believers, *Ṭā Hā* being a revelation of the early Makkan period.

It is sometimes argued that such anecdotes only show that *some* chapters were written, and that therefore there is no evidence that every verse of the Holy Quran was reduced to writing. But there is a fallacy in this argument. The statement that the 20th chapter of the Holy Quran existed in a written form before the conversion of Umar is not made for the purpose of giving any importance to that chapter, or to show that the reporter mentioned it because of its peculiarity. It is made incidentally in a narrative reported with quite a different object, and hence it is only illustrative of the practice of the Holy Prophet and the Muslims at that early date. Even if there were no other evidence of the writing of the Holy Quran except this anecdote, still we should be justified in drawing from it the conclusion that the portions of the Holy

[13] Ibn Hisham. See *The Life of Muhammad*, translation of Ibn Ishaq's *Sīrat Rasūl-ullāh*, by A. Guillaume, Oxford, 1955, pp. 156–157.

Quran revealed up to that time existed in a written form, and that it was the practice to write the revelation. The existence of the 20th chapter in a written form, and the use made of the manuscript in Umar's sister's family, shows that similar use was made of this and other chapters among the believers. They were also aware that the sacred manuscripts could not be touched by impure hands.

The above conclusion is corroborated by another report: "The Messenger of Allah forbade travelling with the Quran to the enemy's land".[14] This report conclusively proves that written copies of the Holy Quran existed in abundance, and Muslims were forbidden to take such copies to the enemy's country, for fear lest they should fall into the hands of men who might spitefully treat them with disrespect.

Abu Bakr collected manuscripts of the Quran written under the Prophet's directions

The circumstances attending the collection of the Holy Quran in the time of Abu Bakr also show that every verse of the revelation had been written down in the presence of the Holy Prophet. Thus we read of two verses which, in spite of Zaid's knowledge that they formed part of the Holy Quran, were not admitted until a written copy of them was found with one of the Companions:

> "So I searched the Quran … until I found the last portion of the chapter *Al-Taubah* [ch. 9] with Abu Khuzaimah, one of the Ansar…" [15]

In explaining the report, part of which has been quoted here, the famous commentator of Bukhari, the author of *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, says:

> "Abu Bakr did not order the writing of anything (i.e., any verse) which was not already written (i.e., in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet), and it was for this reason that Zaid

[14] Bukhari, book 56: Jihad, ch. 129, h. 2990.

[15] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 3, h. 4986.

> hesitated to write the concluding portion of the chapter *Al-Barā'at* [ch. 9] until he found it written, though it was known to him and to those who are mentioned with him".

And a little further on:

> "And the whole Quran was written in manuscripts, but the manuscripts were dispersed, and Abu Bakr collected them in one volume." [16]

Another report by Ibn Abi Dawud is also mentioned, according to which:

> "Umar publicly announced [when the collection of the Quran was taken in hand by Abu Bakr] that whoever possessed any portion of the Quran, which he had directly received from the Messenger of Allah, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, should bring it; and they used to write these on paper and tablets and palm-stems shorn of leaves. Nothing was accepted from anybody until two witnesses bore witness",

to which it is added:

> "And this shows that Zaid did not deem it sufficient that a verse was written until somebody bore witness who had heard it directly from the Holy Prophet's mouth, though Zaid himself remembered it. This he did for greater precaution." [17]

There is another report mentioned by Zuhri, which says: "The Messenger of Allah died while the Quran was written upon palm-stems shorn of leaves and skins".[18] After mentioning some of these reports the commentator adds:

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[16] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 3: *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4988 (vol. 8, p. 629, line 26 to p. 630, first line).

[17] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* as above (vol. 8, p. 631).

[18] *Al-Nihāyah* of Ibn al-Athir (Dictionary of Hadith), under root *'asb.*

> "And their object was that nothing should be copied except from what had been written in the presence of the Prophet, not from memory only." [19]

All these reports point to the certain conclusion that every verse and chapter of the Holy Quran had been written by the direction of the Holy Prophet in his own presence.

5.2: All revelation was committed to memory

Memory safest of repositories with the Arabs

Every portion of the Quran was committed to memory as soon as it was revealed. With the Arabs memory was the safest of repositories. In fact, they placed so great a reliance upon memory that they took a pride in being called *ummīs*, i.e., people who did not know reading or writing, and for whom, therefore, memory served the purpose of writing. They had learnt all their poems and long genealogies by heart.

We learn from numerous reports that whenever a passage was revealed, it was recited by the Holy Prophet to those who happened to be present at the time and many of his followers committed it to memory at once, others again learning it from those who heard it from the mouth of the Prophet. The importance of the Holy Quran for the Companions lay not only in the fact that for them it was a code of moral and social laws; it was not sufficient for them to know only its general purport. They believed every word and every letter of it to proceed from no other than the Divine source, and hence every word of it was for them a heavenly treasure they had on earth, so they secured it in the securest of places, viz., their hearts. For its sake they suffered all kinds of persecution and forsook their friends, their relatives, their properties, and their homes. Every new verse revealed breathed new life into them. Hence they tried their utmost to keep themselves acquainted with

[19] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* as above (vol. 8, p. 631).

every fresh revelation. Those among them who followed trade or any other profession spent a part of the day in the transaction of their affairs and the rest in the company of the Holy Prophet. Those who lived at a distance from the mosque used to go to the Prophet by turns. Thus Umar says:

> "When I went, I returned to bring him [his neighbour] the news of that day relating to revelation and other things, and when he went, he did the same [for me]." [1]

There were also the *Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffah* who passed their whole time in the mosque, and were ever ready to commit to memory any fresh revelation that the Holy Prophet announced.

Stress laid by the Prophet on learning and teaching the Quran

The Holy Prophet himself laid the greatest stress upon the learning, reciting, and teaching of the Holy Quran. One report says:

> "The Messenger of Allah came out and we were in the *Ṣuffah* (annexe) of the mosque, and he asked, 'Which of you likes to go every day to Baṭhā' or 'Aqīq and bring two female camels with large humps upon their backs, without doing any wrong to anybody or to a relative?'. We replied, 'O Messenger of Allah, we all like it'. He said, 'Does not one of you come in the morning to the mosque, and teach or repeat two verses of the Book of Allah, which is better for him than two camels? And three verses are better than three camels, and four verses better than four camels: in this way is any number of verses better than the same number of camels'." [2]

Uthman reported that the Holy Prophet said:

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[1] Bukhari, book 3: Knowledge, ch. 27, h. 89.

[2] Muslim, book 6: Prayers of Travellers and shortening them, ch. 41: 'Virtue of reciting the Quran in prayer and learning it', hadith 802.

> "The best among you is he who has learnt the Quran and teaches it." [3]

Some other reports run as follows:

> "Aishah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: The skilful in reciting the Quran are classed with the scribes, who are honoured and virtuous; and he who reiterates in reciting the Quran, on account of his inability to recite it, has a double reward." [4]

> "Ibn Umar reported that the Messenger of Allah said: "No one is to be envied but two persons — one, a man to whom Allah has given knowledge of the Quran, and he recites it, acting upon it, day and night, and the other a man whom Allah has given wealth, and he spends it in the way of Allah day and night." [5]

Hence the Companions of the Prophet not only acted upon the Quran but they also recited it aloud. This fact is specially mentioned in connection with Abu Bakr, of whom it is related that he recited the Holy Quran aloud in the compound of his house, which was situated on a public thoroughfare, and the disbelievers objected to this on the ground that he thus influenced the minds of others and persuaded them in favour of the Quran.[6]

Various other reports of undoubted authenticity, showing that the recitation of the Holy Quran was an important obligation which rested upon every Muslim, are contained in the collections of reports. Bukhari, in his book *Virtues of the Quran* (book 66), has a chapter named *Istidhkār of the Qur'ān and its Ta'āhud* (ch. 23), that is, "Reciting the Quran frequently and recurring to it time after time".

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[3] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 21, h. 5027, 5028.

[4] Muslim, book 6: Prayers of Travellers…, ch. 38, hadith 798a.

[5] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 21, hadith 5025.

[6] Bukhari, book 39: *Kifālah* , ch. 4, hadith 2297.

In this chapter various reports are narrated enjoining the frequent recitation of the Holy Quran. The same renowned collection in this book has another chapter headed *The teaching of the Quran to children* (ch. 25), a third with the heading *The most excellent of you is he who learns and teaches the Quran* (ch. 21), and a fourth which is headed *The reciting of the Quran from memory* (ch. 22).

For the sake of brevity I give simply the headings of the chapters. These headings are sufficient to show that committing the Quran to memory was enjoined by the Holy Prophet upon all his followers, and it was considered by his Companions to be a duty fraught with great religious merit. Hence it was necessary that everyone of them should commit to memory at least some parts of the Holy Book. Though even now there are thousands of men in every Muslim country who can repeat the whole of the Quran from memory, the peculiar conditions existing in Arabia facilitated the task to a far greater extent. This is admitted even by a hostile critic:

> "Passionately fond of poetry, but without the ready means for committing to writing the effusions of their bards, the Arabs had long been used to imprint these, as well as the traditions of genealogical and tribal events, on the living tablets of the heart. The recollective faculty was thus cultivated to the highest pitch; and it was applied, with all the ardour of an awakened spirit, to the Quran. Such was the tenacity of their memory, and so great their power of application, that several of his followers could, during the Prophet's lifetime, repeat with scrupulous accuracy the whole as then in use." [7]

Greater knowledge of the Quran entitled a person to be Imam

There were other reasons which made the Companions vie one with another in committing the Holy Book to memory. The office

[7] Muir's *Life of Mohammad*, Intro., p. xvi.

of *imāmat*, or leading of public prayers, was as a rule bestowed upon the man who had the greater knowledge of the Holy Quran.[8] All authentic reports establish this point. One report tells us that in a certain tribe a boy six or seven years old used to lead the prayers because he knew a greater portion of the Holy Quran than any other member of that tribe. This boy, Amr ibn Salamah, thus relates his own story:

> "We (i.e., the tribe to which the narrator belonged) lived in a place by a river, and riders would pass by us. When they passed us (after visiting Makkah) we would ask them about the Prophet and who he was. They told us that he claims that Allah has sent him and revealed to him this and that. So I committed those revelations to memory and they stuck in my heart. … After the conquest of Makkah every tribe hastened (to go to Makkah) to accept Islam and my father was the first of my tribe to accept Islam. When he returned, he said I have come to you from the true Prophet who said to me: 'Say prayers at such and such times and when the time of prayer comes one of you should call the *Adhān* and the one who knows the Quran more than the others should act as Imam.' So they thought about it and there was none who knew the Quran more than me because of what I had already committed to memory from the riders. So they made me Imam and I was six or seven years old." [9]

The distinction of having the office of being Imam conferred on one was a practical incentive to a greater knowledge of the Quran. Similarly, when a new tribe accepted Islam, the man who was chosen to be sent to them to teach them the doctrines and principles of the new faith was one who was most acquainted

[8] Muslim, book 5: Mosques and Place of Prayer, ch. 53. Tirmidhi, book 2; Prayer, ch. 60, hadith 235.

[9] *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, book 4: Prayer, ch. Imamat, section 3, hadith 1058.

with the Quran. There are many reports which show that the reciters of the Quran were highly honoured and respected in every way among the Companions.

The Prophet himself recited the Quran frequently

These were the reasons which led a great number of the Companions of the Holy Prophet to engrave the words of the Quran on the tablets of their hearts. The Holy Prophet himself set an example in frequently reciting the Holy Quran in public as well as in private. It was not only in prayers that long portions of the Holy Book were recited. We have on record instances showing that the Prophet recited the Holy Quran when travelling on the back of a camel.[10] He also loved to hear others recite the Holy Word. Still another reports a Companion as saying:

> "The Messenger of Allah said [to me]: 'Recite to me [the Quran]'. I replied: 'Shall I recite to you and to you it has been revealed?' He said: 'I love to hear others recite it'. Thereupon I began to recite the chapter *The Women*." [11]

These anecdotes show that the Holy Prophet induced his Companions by his own example to recite the Holy Quran. These inducements were not without their effect. The Muslims treasured up the Word of God in their hearts, and its reading and teaching became very common. So common, indeed, had the recitation of the Quran become, that when the Holy Prophet spoke of the disappearance of the knowledge of the Quran from people at some future time, Ziyad, son of Labid, one of the Companions, at once cried out:

> "How could it disappear from us when we read the Quran and teach it to our women and children?" [12]

[10] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 24, hadith 5034.

[11] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 35, hadith 5055.

[12] Tirmidhi, book 41: Knowledge, ch. 5, hadith 2653.

This question arose out of a misapprehension of the words of the Holy Prophet, who meant, not that the words of the Holy Quran would disappear, but that people would not act in accordance with the spirit of those words. The Holy Prophet told Ziyad in reply that the Torah and the Gospels were still with the Jews and the Christians but they no longer benefit from them.

Limits placed on recital of the Quran

Eagerness to commit the Holy Quran to memory and recite it frequently was in fact so great that the Prophet had to place a limit as to the number of days in which the whole Quran should be recited. According to one hadith the Prophet, on being asked as to how much time one should take to finish one reading of the Quran, laid down the limit of one month.[13] The division of the Quran into thirty parts seems to be based on this direction. This hadith goes on to say that the minimum limit allowed was seven days.[14] It is stated that one of the Companions who finished the recitation of the whole of the Quran once every night, was expressly enjoined by him not to finish it in less than seven days, and was forbidden to go through the whole once every night.[15]

In fact, the Prophet himself apportioned the Holy Quran into seven *manzils*,[16] and thus practically laid down the restriction that the Holy Quran should not be recited in less than seven days. Ibn Mas'ud relates that the Holy Prophet said: "Read the Quran in seven days, and do not read it in less than three days". According to another report, Aishah said that "the Holy Prophet did not usually finish the Quran in less than three days". All these reports show clearly that the Companions vied one with another in the

[13] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 34, hadith 5054. Tirmidhi, book 46: Recitation, ch. 13, hadith 2946.

[14] This is in the version above in Bukhari. In Tirmidhi's version it is five days.

[15] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 34, hadith 5052.

[16] See later on p. 208 and the report quoted from Anas preceding it on p. 207.

frequent recitation of the Quran.[17] In fact, so frequently was the recitation of the Holy Quran resorted to, that injunctions became necessary to stop a too rapid recitation. It is also clear from these reports that the whole of the Quran was committed to memory by many of the Companions, otherwise it could not be spoken of as being *finished* in a stated interval of time. That it was recited from memory is clear from the fact that it was recited at night.

Persons who knew the whole Quran by heart

These conclusions are further supported by many trustworthy reports, which show that there were numerous men among the Companions who could recite the whole Quran from memory. These men were called *qurrā'* (pl. of *Qāri'*) or the reciters, and they were known to have committed the whole Quran to memory. *Fatḥ al-Bārī* explains the word *qurrā'* as meaning "persons noted for committing the Quran to memory and for teaching it to others".[18] Of course, the word also signified persons having a sound knowledge of the Quran. Seventy of the *qurrā'* were treacherously put to death at the Bi'r Ma'unah by a tribe of the unbelievers.[19] The fact that such a large number of them were murdered in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet shows that there were hundreds of them among the Companions. In the chapter headed *The Qurrā' from among the Companions of the Holy Prophet*, Bukhari relates several anecdotes. In the first of these, Abdullah, son of Amr (who had committed the whole of the Quran to memory, see p. 195), is reported to have said, when speaking of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud:

[17] For the two reports from Ibn Mas'ud and Aishah quoted above, see *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 34: In how many days should the Quran be recited?, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 5054 (vol. 8, p. 715).

[18] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 8: *Qurrā'* among the Companions of the Prophet, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 5005 (vol. 8, p. 664).

[19] Bukhari, book 64: Military Expeditions, ch. 28, hadith 4088 and 4090.

> "I shall ever love him, for I heard the Holy Prophet say: 'Learn the Quran from four men: from Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Sālim, Mu'adh, and Ubayy ibn Ka'b'." [20]

This, of course, did not imply inability on the part of the other Companions to teach the Holy Quran, nor did the words mean that none of the Companions besides these four retained the whole of the Quran in their memory. In fact, to be a good teacher of the Holy Quran, it was not sufficient that a person should be able to recite the Holy Book from memory. It was absolutely necessary that he should have a good understanding and a sound knowledge of the Holy Quran. Probably they were named because they always tried to learn the revelations directly from the Holy Prophet. One of them, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, it is reported, used to say that he received over seventy chapters of the Holy Quran directly from the mouth of the Holy Prophet.[21]

Other reports tell us that there were many other Companions who could recite the whole of the Quran from memory. To take an example, Abu Bakr is not named in the above report, but it is a fact that he retained the whole of the Quran in his memory. It was Abu Bakr whom the Holy Prophet appointed on his death-bed to lead the public prayers. Authentic reports, as already stated, show that the person appointed to lead the prayers was always one who knew the Quran most. In cases where several persons had equal knowledge, as, for instance, when they all knew the whole of the Quran by heart, other tests were applied. Now, it is certain that there were men among the Companions who could recite the whole of the Quran from memory. Therefore Abu Bakr could not be appointed to lead the prayers, if he did not know the whole of the Quran by heart. Hence it follows that Abu Bakr also could recite the whole of the Quran from memory.

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[20] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 8, hadith 4999.

[21] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 8, hadith 5000.

Similarly Abdullah ibn Amr retained the whole of the Quran in his memory, finishing its recital every night, whereupon the Holy Prophet told him to finish the recital once in a month.[22] In fact, many persons are mentioned as being able to recite the whole of the Quran from memory in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, among these being the four Caliphs, viz., Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, and such renowned Companions as Talhah, Sa‘d, Ibn Mas‘ud, Sālim, Abu Hurairah, etc., while three women, viz., Aishah, Hafsah and Umm Salamah are also named in the same category. Several other persons are also named from among the *Ansar* as being able to recite the whole of the Quran from memory. But it is not to be supposed that only those persons were the reciters whose names have been preserved to us in reports. Seventy of them were killed by treachery in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, and about the same number fell in the battle of Yamāmah, which was fought a few months after his death.

Recital of the Quran was necessary in public as well as private prayers

The recitation of the Quran and its committal to memory were not, however, only optional, for the Quran formed a part of public as well as private prayers. Five times a day had the Muslims to pray publicly, but every public service had an additional part, called *sunnah*, to be performed privately, while prayers in the later portion of the night were purely of a private nature. The recitation of portions of the Holy Quran in all these prayers was obligatory, and thus every Muslim had of necessity to repeat certain portions of it every day. Now, it is an established fact that generally very long portions were recited in the prayers, especially in those said during the latter part of the night. The Holy Prophet himself is related to have often recited the long chapters in the beginning of the Quran in his *tahajjud* prayers. His Companions also followed

[22] Bukhari, book 30: Fasting, ch. 58, hadith 1978. Muslim, book 13: Fasting, ch. 35, hadith 1159b.

his example. Thus one Companion is said, in an anecdote left of him, to have recited in his *tahajjud* prayers the second chapter, which forms a twelfth part of the Quran. Even in the public prayers long chapters were recited. The evening prayers are the least suited for the recitation of the longer chapters, but even in these the Holy Prophet recited such chapters as the *Ṭūr*, ch. 52.[23] One Companion recited the second chapter in prayers at the nightfall, and a complaint was made against him by one who was tired by a whole day's labour.[24] In their private prayers also, the Companions recited long chapters.

Thus not only was it necessary that every one of them should commit the whole or a certain portion of the Holy Quran to memory, but the part so committed was always kept fresh in the mind by constant recitation in prayers. A woman Companion relates how she learnt a certain chapter, *Qāf*, by heart from its frequent recitation in the Friday gatherings.[25] In fact, if there had been no other means of giving publicity to the Quran, its mere recitation in prayers was sufficient to give it such publication as would have guarded it against any possible alteration or loss.

There is only one hadith the evidence of which is considered to be conflicting with that furnished by all the hadith cited above:

> "Anas reported that the Holy Prophet died while none had collected (*jam'*) the Quran with the exception of four men: Abu ad-Darda and Mu'adh ibn Jabal and Zaid ibn Thabit and Abu Zaid." [26]

In a report to the same effect narrated by the same authority, the name of Ubayy is mentioned instead of Abu ad-Dardā'.[27] This

[23] Bukhari, book 10: Call to Prayer, ch. 99, hadith 765.

[24] Bukhari, book 10: Call to Prayer, ch. 99, hadith 701.

[25] Muslim, book 7: Friday Prayers, ch. 13, hadith 872a, 872b, 873a, 873b.

[26] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 8, hadith 5004.

[27] Bukhari, book 63: Virtues of the Ansar, ch. 17, hadith 3810.

hadith does not speak of committing the Quran to memory but of the collection of its manuscripts. There is no doubt that the word *jam'* (collecting) is used in Hadith in both senses, *collection of the manuscripts* and *the retaining of the whole of the Quran in memory*, but the latter significance is out of the question here, for it is a fact established beyond all doubt that a very large number of Companions knew the whole of the Quran by heart. Nor can an objection be raised to the first significance on the ground that, if the manuscripts of the Holy Quran had already been collected by these four men, why Abu Bakr and Umar were so anxious for its collection when many of the *qurrā'* fell in the battle of Yamāmah and why Zaid considered it a very heavy task, when he was chosen for collecting the scattered manuscripts of the Holy Quran into one volume. The fact is that Zaid sought the manuscripts that were written in the presence and by the direction of the Holy Prophet.

Even if we admit, for the sake of argument, the existence of certain differences in the various reports quoted above, the one conclusion upon which they all agree is absolutely certain, viz., that among the Companions of the Holy Prophet there were persons who retained in memory the whole of the Quran as taught by the Holy Prophet, and who at his death had the whole of it engraved on the tablets of their hearts. All this was done in obedience to the injunctions of the Holy Prophet, who laid great stress upon the reciting of the Quran and the committing of it to memory. And these measures to guard the text of the Holy Quran were in addition to writing. It may also be pointed out here that the gradual revelation of the Quran afforded great facility in committing it to memory. The interval between the revelation of two verses or two chapters afforded the Companions an opportunity to repeat it as often as they liked. The entire Quran was revealed in the long period of twenty-three years, and if Muslim boys of the age of ten or twelve years can even now commit the whole Quran to memory within one or two years, the Arab possessors of wonderfully retentive memories, to whom the importance of the Quran was far greater than to any Muslim of a later age, would not find it difficult

to memorize it within the long period of twenty-three years, especially when it was given to them gradually.

5.3: Arrangement of verses and chapters was the Prophet's own work

The Holy Quran was revealed piecemeal during a long period extending over twenty-three years. Some of the chapters were revealed complete, but the revelation of many others was fragmentary and extended over long periods. Now, the arrangement of chapters and verses in the copies of the Holy Quran at present in the hands of the Muslims does not follow the order of revelation. The important question before us, therefore, is whether the Holy Prophet himself arranged the verses and chapters in an order different from that of their revelation, and, if so, whether the present arrangement is the work of the Holy Prophet? In other words, was the Holy Quran left by the Holy Prophet in the same condition, as regards the arrangement of its verses and chapters, as that in which we now find it, or is its present condition different from that in which the Holy Prophet left it?

Internal evidence about the arrangement

That the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Holy Quran was effected by the Holy Prophet under the guidance of Divine revelation is shown in the first place by the Holy Quran itself. There we read:

> "Surely on Us rests the collecting of it (*jam'a-hu*) and the reciting of it (*qurāna-hu*). So when We recite it, follow its recitation." — 75:17–18

This is one of the very earliest revelations, showing that the collection of the Holy Quran, that is, its gathering into one whole, with an arrangement of its various parts, was according to the Divine scheme to be brought about by the guidance of Divine revelation. Arrangement and collection were, therefore, as much the work of Divine revelation as the reading of a verse to the Holy Prophet,

i.e., its revelation. In another chapter, revealed a little later, we have:

> "And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Quran been revealed to him all at once? It is so that We may strengthen your heart with it and We have arranged it well in arranging." — 25:32

The Quran itself, therefore, makes it clear that its collection and arrangement were also brought about by Divine revelation. It should be borne in mind that the word *jam'* in 75:17 above implies both *collection* and *arrangement*, since no collection could be brought about without an arrangement. These verses describe the arrangement and collection as a process different from the revelation of a verse to the Holy Prophet, thus showing that from the first it was meant that the verses and the chapters of the Holy Quran should be arranged in an order different from that of their revelation. If the order in collection were to be the same as the order of the reading of the different verses to the Holy Prophet, i.e., the order of their revelation, collection and reading would not have been described as two different things.

Historical evidence as to arrangement

History bears ample testimony to the truth of the above assertion made in the Holy Quran, and we meet with the clearest proof in authentic and reliable reports that the Holy Prophet left at his death the complete Quran with the same arrangement of the verses and chapters as we have now in every Arabic Quran. We will consider the arrangement of verses and that of chapters separately, and in each enquiry we shall have to discuss the following points:

1. Was any arrangement followed by the Holy Prophet himself and by his Companions in his lifetime?
2. Was that arrangement different from the order in which the verses of the chapters were revealed?
3. Does the present arrangement differ from that followed by, or which existed in the lifetime of, the Holy Prophet?

That such a large book, treating of so many and such varied subjects, should have been committed to memory and regularly recited in and outside prayers, and taught by one person to another, without there being any settled arrangement of its parts, is a most preposterous proposition, but there is hardly a Christian critic of Islam who has not advanced it. The grounds for this assertion are the same in every case. Not the least regard is paid to historical evidence, and mere assertion that no arrangement is discoverable in the verses and chapters is made the basis on which the proposition rests. The following short paragraph from Muir's Introduction to his *Life of Muhammad* is not only illustrative of the assertions of Christian critics in general, but it also shows how the author himself has evaded the historical evidence:

> "We are not, however, to assume that the entire Quran was at this period repeated in any fixed order. The present compilation, indeed, is held by the Muslims to follow the arrangement prescribed by Muhammad; *and early tradition might appear to imply some known sequence.*[1] But this cannot be admitted; for had any fixed order been observed or sanctioned by the Prophet, it would unquestionably have been preserved in the subsequent collection. Now the Quran, as handed down to our time, follows in the disposition of its several parts no intelligible arrangement whatever, either of subject or time; and it is inconceivable that Muhammad should have enjoined its recital invariably in this order. We must even doubt whether the number of Suras was determined by Muhammad as we now have them. The internal sequence at any rate of the contents of the several Suras cannot, in most cases, have been that intended by the Prophet." [2]

Some of the footnotes given under this paragraph show the struggle in the writer's mind between historical facts and religious prejudice. Thus, while denying the existence of any fixed order in the Quran in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, Muir had to admit:

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[1] Italics are mine (Muhammad Ali).

[2] Pp. xvi–xvii.

"Thus we read of certain Companions who could repeat the whole Quran in a *given time,* which might be held to imply some usual connection of the parts" (italics are Muir's). In another footnote it is admitted that there were four or five persons who could repeat "with scrupulous accuracy" the whole of the Quran, and "several others who could very nearly repeat the whole, before Muhammad's death".[3] Again, while denying that even the number of *sūrahs* was determined by the Holy Prophet, he adds the following footnote:

> "But there is reason to believe that the chief Suras, including all passages in most common use, were fixed and known by name or other distinctive mark. Some are spoken of, in early and well-authenticated traditions, as having been so referred to by Muhammad himself. Thus he recalled his fugitive followers at the discomfiture of Honein by shouting to them as 'the men of the *Sūrat al-Bakara*' (i.e., Sura ii). Several persons are stated by tradition to have learnt by heart a *certain number* of suras in Muhammad's lifetime. Thus Abdullah bin Mas'ud learned seventy Suras from the Prophet's own mouth, and Muhammad on his death-bed repeated seventy Suras, 'among which were the Seven long ones'. These traditions signify a recognized division of at least some part of the revelation into Suras, if not a usual order in repeating the Suras themselves. The liturgical use of the Suras by Muhammad must, no doubt, have in some measure fixed their form, and probably also their sequence." [4]

In connection with the same subject it is said in another footnote that: "The traditions just cited as to the number of Suras which some of the Companions could repeat, and which Muhammad himself repeated on his death-bed, also imply the existence of such Suras in a complete and finished form".[5]

Thus almost every remark made in the paragraph quoted first is contradicted in the footnotes on the basis of historical facts met

[3] For these footnotes, see p. xvii, footnote 1and p. xvi, footnote 2.

[4] Pp. xvii, footnote 2, continued on p. xviii.

[5] P. xviii, footnote 1.

with in authentic reports. Though the statements in the footnotes are made reservedly, yet the contradictions are too clear to escape unnoticed by any careful reader, and the struggle in the writer's mind can be easily discerned. In the text it is asserted that there was no fixed order or arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Holy Quran, and historical evidence is produced in the footnotes showing that there was a connection. The text makes the allegation that even the *Sūrahs* were not distinctly marked out by the Holy Prophet and their number was not determined by him, and the footnote brings forward historical testimony to the effect that there was a recognized division and that the form of the chapters was no doubt fixed. The reservations contained in such expressions as "some part" and "some measure" were only natural, considering the allegations in the text.

It can easily be seen that if seventy *Sūrahs*, including the seven long ones, existed "in a complete and finished form", as the footnote admits — and there is no evidence showing that the remaining forty-four short *Sūrahs*, which were, no doubt, generally recited in prayers, did not exist in the same form — the presumption will be that all the *Sūrahs* existed "in a complete and finished form". This conclusion becomes clearer still, when it is borne in mind that the same writer has also admitted that there were several Companions who could repeat, not only seventy *Sūrahs*, but the *whole Quran*, and that too "*with scrupulous accuracy*".

Without a known order of verses the Quran could not be committed to memory

The assertion that no arrangement was followed in the case of single verses revealed at different times is so absurd on the very face of it that it hardly requires a refutation. How was it possible for anybody to commit the Holy Quran to memory, if there was no settled order in which the verses were read? What order did the different copies follow? Or was it that each copy of the Holy Quran current at the time followed a different order? And every man who knew any portion of the Holy Quran — and every one of the

Companions knew some portion — followed a different arrangement? Does any evidence support these assertions? Or did each reciter follow a different order? What, again, was the order of the verses followed by those who led the public prayers? Is it conceivable that a book which was so widely committed to memory, and which was so frequently recited by thousands of men, existed in such an orderless state?

If there were no other evidence to show that the verses in the different chapters of the Holy Quran followed some arrangement, the mere fact that the Holy Book was committed to memory by the Companions would be sufficient to establish that conclusion. There are many chapters containing more than a hundred verses each, and unless these were arranged in a settled order, no one could be said to have committed to memory the whole of any chapter. Take the different permutations of only a hundred verses, and you will see that no two out of a hundred thousand men could have agreed upon one arrangement. In such a case there would have been not one Quran, which the Companions could learn from each other, but everybody would have his own Quran, and no one would be certain of the correctness of what his brother recited. Moreover, we learn from authentic reports that when any person, while reciting a portion of the Holy Quran from memory in prayers, made a mistake or left out a verse, someone of those who listened to him corrected the mistake or pointed out the particular verse. Now, this could not be done unless the same arrangement of verses was followed by all. In fact, it was simply impossible to commit the whole Quran or any part of it to memory unless there was some arrangement to be followed.

Chronological order could not be observed

Considerations such as the above clearly show that some arrangement of verses was necessarily followed. Was it the order of revelation? There is clear historical evidence that the Holy Prophet arranged the verses, not according to their chronological order, but according to matter. There were, no doubt, many chapters that

were revealed complete, but there were others, particularly the longer ones, that were revealed by portions. Chronologically, verses of one chapter were followed by those of another, and hence in the arrangement of verses in chapters the chronological order could not be observed. The practice of the Holy Prophet in such cases is clearly stated in authentic reports. As Uthman tells us, in a report already quoted (see p. 179):

> "It was customary with the Messenger of Allah, when portions of different chapters were being revealed to him, that when any verse was revealed, he called one of those persons who used to write the Holy Quran and said to him: 'Write these verses in the chapter where such and such verses occur'."

From this it appears that the place and chapter for every verse were pointed out by the Holy Prophet himself. With such obviously conclusive testimony before him, no sensible person would deny that the work of the arrangement of the verses in every chapter was done by the Holy Prophet himself, and, as the Holy Quran tells us, it was done under the guidance of Divine revelation, and the arrangement did not follow the chronological order of the revelation of verses.

No change was ever introduced by Uthman or anybody else

If the arrangement of verses was different from the order of their revelation, the next question that arises is, Was the arrangement different from the one upon which the whole Muslim world is now agreed? We must answer this question in the negative. The arrangement of the verses in the Quran we have in our hands is not in accordance with the order of revelation; and hence, if there is no trace in the history of the Quran of any change having been brought about in the arrangement of its verses at any time, the conclusion that the present arrangement is exactly the same as that followed by the Holy Prophet is absolutely certain and final. Now, it is admitted on all hands, and the truth of the fact has not been

questioned by the most hostile critics of Islam, that there has not been the slightest change in any word or letter of the Quran or in the arrangement of its verses or chapters since the time of Uthman, the third Caliph. Our copies of the Quran are admittedly exact copies, true and authentic in every way, of the copies made by Uthman, and hence, to prove that the arrangement of verses and chapters at present is the same as that followed by the Holy Prophet, we have only to show that the collection made by Uthman followed the original arrangement.

It can easily be seen that at the time of his making the collection Uthman had no motive for changing the fixed arrangement which up to that time was followed by the Companions of the Holy Prophet. That an arrangement different from the chronological order of revelation was followed by the Holy Prophet, and that the same arrangement was followed by the Companions in the learning and teaching of the Holy Quran, has already been shown. That that arrangement was changed by Uthman, there is not the slightest evidence to show. When Uthman began to make copies of the Quran from Abu Bakr's collection, thousands of the Companions of the Holy Prophet were still living, and no change in the arrangement of verses could have remained unnoticed.

Moreover, the task of making the required copies was not in the charge of Uthman personally, but in that of several of the best-known Companions, reputed for their knowledge of the Quran, and none of these can be shown to have had any motive for altering the arrangement of verses existing at the time. Nor is there the slightest trace in the historical record of the time that the arrangement was altered. No charge has ever been preferred against Uthman by any sect of Islam or any individual that he had changed the arrangement of the verses in the chapters of the Holy Quran. In fact, the only charge against him is that he disallowed certain readings, and the nature of this charge I will describe later on. But of any alteration in the arrangement of verses there is absolutely no mention whatever in any report, authentic or unauthentic.

Positive evidence that the present arrangement is the Prophet's arrangement

Besides the negative proof cited above, which conclusively shows that at no time in the history of the Quran was the arrangement of its verses altered in the slightest degree, there is positive evidence leading to the same conclusion. This evidence may be gathered from incidental remarks made in certain authentic reports. Bukhari relates the following:

> "The Messenger of Allah said: Whoever reads the last two verses of the *Sūrah al-Baqarah* on any night, they are sufficient for him'." [6]

This shows that the Holy Prophet himself followed an arrangement which he had made known to his Companions, and they all followed the same arrangement; for if such had not been the case, he could not have referred to two verses as the *last two verses* of a certain chapter. The report unmistakably proves that every verse had a known and fixed place in a chapter, which no reciter of the Quran could change. In the second place, it shows that the verses with which the second chapter now ends were also the concluding verses of that chapter in the time of the Holy Prophet, and therefore the arrangement in the copies of the Quran at present is the same as that followed by the Holy Prophet. In support of this, there is another report in which the concluding verses of the second chapter are identified with the 285th and 286th verses of that chapter as enumerated in the present Translation.[7]

According to another hadith,[8] the Holy Prophet told his followers to memorise the "first ten verses" of the chapter entitled *The*

[6] Bukhari, book 64: Military Expeditions, ch. 12, hadith 4008.

[7] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 10: Virtues of *Sūrah al-Baqarah,* commenting on Bukhari's hadith 5010 (vol. 8, p. 673).

[8] See Muslim, book 6: Prayers of Travellers and shortening them, ch. 44: 'Virtue of *Sūrah al-Kahf* and *Āyat al-Kursī* ', hadith 809a. Abu Dawud, book 39: Battles, ch. 14: Appearance of the *Dajjāl,* hadith 4323.

Cave as a protection from the *Dajjāl* or Antichrist. Had there been no arrangement of verses, the "first ten verses" would have been a meaningless phrase, because it would not have indicated any particular ten verses. The last ten verses of the same chapter are also mentioned in this connection in a variation of this report.[9] A third speaks of the last ten verses of *Āl 'Imrān*, the third chapter, being recited by the Prophet when he got up for his *tahajjud* prayers.[10] All these hadith and numerous other similar hadith show conclusively that the arrangement of verses in the chapters was the Holy Prophet's own work. That this arrangement was the same as that followed now in the copies of the Holy Quran is shown by the absence of any other arrangement in the whole Muslim world.

Arrangement of chapters was also the Prophet's own work

Conclusive evidence that not only the verses but even the chapters were arranged by the Holy Prophet himself is afforded by the following hadith reported by Anas:

> "I was in the Thaqif embassy at the time of the Bani Thaqif's conversion to Islam. … The Messenger of Allah said to us, 'My portion of the Holy Quran has come to me unexpectedly, so I do not intend to go out, until I finish it'. Thereupon we questioned the Companions of the Messenger of Allah, as to how they divided the Quran into portions. They said: 'We observe the following division into portions, three chapters and five chapters, and seven chapters, and nine chapters, and eleven chapters, and thirteen chapters, and all the remaining chapters beginning with *Qāf*, which are termed the *mufaṣṣal*' ".[11]

[9] See Abu Dawud as cited above.

[10] Bukhari, book 65: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 19 under *Sūrah* 3, hadith 4571.

[11] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* near end of ch. 6: *Ta'līf al-Qur'ān,* commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4996 (vol. 8, p. 659).

There is good reason to believe the authenticity of this report. It divides the Holy Quran into seven *manzils* or portions, each portion to be recited in one day, and the recital of the whole Quran was thus finished in seven days. From other trustworthy hadith already quoted we learn that the Holy Prophet enjoined his Companions not to finish the Holy Quran in less than seven days; and the two reports, communicated through entirely different channels, corroborating as they do the testimony of each other, testify to each other's truth and authenticity. Moreover, they are both accepted by eminent collectors of Hadith. Now, the hadith quoted above shows clearly an arrangement of chapters, for the division into portions mentioned in this report is observed to this day by the whole Muslim world. The seven portions are called the seven *manzils*, or stages, and they include the same number of chapters as is mentioned in the hadith. The seventh portion begins with the chapter entitled *Qāf*, as stated in the report, and the total number of chapters contained in the first six portions is forty-eight, as in the copies of the Quran in our hands. It should be borne in mind that in our copies, *Qāf* is the fiftieth chapter, the difference arising from the fact that in the report quoted above the *Fātiḥah*, or the Opening Chapter, is not included. This report affords the clearest and most conclusive testimony that the arrangement of the chapters of the Holy Quran was brought about by the Holy Prophet himself, like that of its verses, and their present arrangement does not differ in the least from the original.

It may perhaps be objected that such an arrangement was not possible, as the Quran was not complete till the death of the Holy Prophet, and verses and chapters were constantly being revealed. It is quite true that the Quran could not be said to be complete so long as the recipient of the Divine revelation lived, but this could not interfere with the arrangement of verses and chapters. The word *Qur'ān* signified the part of the Quran that had been revealed. The report quoted above speaks of the conversion to Islam of the Bani Thaqif, which happened in the ninth year of the Hijrah, in which year the chapter entitled *The Immunity* (ch. 9)

which is looked upon as the latest in chronological order, was revealed. Hence at the time of which the report speaks, almost the whole of the Quran had been revealed, and the division into seven portions, which speaks of the number of chapters in each portion, has in its favour the authority of the Holy Prophet himself. The verses that were revealed afterwards were put in their proper place in the chapters to which they belonged. Only one short *sūrah* entitled *The Help* (ch. 110) was revealed afterwards and it found its proper place in the arrangement of chapters, without interfering with the enumeration of the chapters as contained in the first six portions, as it is placed in the seventh portion, the number of chapters in which is not specified.

Tālīf Ibn Mas'ūd

As regards the suggestion that some of the Companions followed a different arrangement of chapters, it is simply a misconception. The best-known of these is what is known as the *Tālīf Ibn Mas'ūd* or the Combination of Ibn Mas'ud. The fact is simply this that the Holy Prophet sometimes combined certain shorter chapters in his *tahajjud* prayers and Ibn Mas'ud had a particular liking for that combination. But it should be borne in mind that in prayers everybody was free, as every Muslim even now is free, to recite any portion of the Quran he liked. This freedom is expressly given in a hadith which says that the recital of the *Fātiḥah* which is obligatory in every *rak'ah* of the prayer may be followed by the recital of any other portion of the Quran which one chooses.[12] Similarly, two or more chapters could be read in a single *rak'ah*, and in some cases there were combinations of such chapters for recital in prayers. In his *tahajjud* prayers, for instance, the Holy Prophet used sometimes to recite twenty chapters, eighteen of which were termed the *mufaṣṣal*, or the shorter chapters towards the close of the Quran, beginning with *Qāf* (ch. 50) and two *Ḥā*

[12] Abu Dawud, book 2: Prayer, ch. 138: He who left out reciting *Fātiḥah* in prayer, hadith 818.

Mīms, or chapters commencing with *Ḥā Mīm*. Thus in each *rak'ah* two of these chapters were recited, the total number of *rak'ahs* being ten.

The Holy Prophet made a peculiar combination which has been preserved to us through Ibn Mas'ud, and accordingly it is known as the *Tālīf Ibn Mas'ūd* or the Combination of Ibn Mas'ud. Now, this combination has nothing to do with the arrangement of chapters of the Quran, nor was it followed on all occasions. This peculiar combination was, in fact, preserved and mentioned only on account of peculiarity and departure from the original arrangement of chapters.

Even in the public prayers the arrangement of chapters was not necessarily followed. On one occasion the Holy Prophet recited the fourth chapter in the first *rak'ah* and the third in the second, and the incident has been preserved to us in a report only because a departure was made in this case from the recognized arrangement.[13] Many other instances of the same kind are on record. It is related for instance that the Prophet used to recite the 32nd chapter in the first *rak'ah* and the 76th chapter in the second *rak'ah* in his morning prayers on Fridays.[14] Another Hadith shows that a person had a special liking for the 112th chapter of the Quran and he recited it in every *rak'ah* of prayer, following it with any other chapter that he liked and the Prophet did not object to it.[15] The so-called *Tālīf Ibn Mas'ūd* has therefore nothing to do with the arrangement of chapters in the Quran.

Ubayy and Ali's Collections

Two other persons are named as having followed a different arrangement of chapters in the collection of the Quran, Ubayy ibn

[13] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 6: *Ta'līf al-Qur'ān,* commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4996 (vol. 8, p. 656).

[14] Bukhari, book 11: Friday Prayer, ch. 10, hadith 891.

[15] Tirmidhi, book 45: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 11: About *Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ*, hadith 2901.

Ka'b and Ali. The case of the former may be disposed of at once, as there is no testimony worth the name which shows that Ubayy followed a different arrangement of chapters. The only thing stated about him is that he placed the fourth chapter before the third. If that was the only difference of arrangement, it is quite immaterial, and the error may, as in the case of Ibn Mas'ud, be due to the reason that the Holy Prophet himself once recited the fourth chapter before the third in one of his prayers. As regards Ali, he is said to have collected the chapters in order of revelation, and there is a report stating that he did not rest after the Holy Prophet's death, until he had collected the Quran, arranging its chapters in chronological order. The authenticity of this report has been questioned, for such a Quran was never handed down to posterity, though Ali reigned as Caliph immediately after Uthman. And according to one report Ali himself said that "the greatest of men as regards the collection of the Quran is Abu Bakr; he is the first man who collected the Quran".[16] Besides this, Ubayy and Ali were among the men under whose directions the copies of the Quran were written in the time of Uthman and this is conclusive testimony that they considered the present arrangement of chapters as the right one.

Why the ninth chapter does not commence with *Bismillāh*

There is one hadith more which may be mentioned in connection with the arrangement of chapters. Ibn Abbas says:

> "I said to Uthman, 'What led you to put *al-Anfāl* (ch. 8) in juxtaposition with *al-Barā'at* (ch. 9) and you did not write between them the line *Bismillāh ar-Raḥmān ar-Raḥīm*, thus classing these two chapters with the seven long ones?' Uthman said: 'It was customary with the Messenger of Allah, when portions of different chapters were being revealed to him, that when any verse was revealed, he called one of those persons who used to write

[16] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 3: *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4988 (vol. 8, p. 629).

> the Holy Quran and said to him: 'Write these verses in the chapter where such and such verses occur.' Now *al-Anfāl* was one of the chapters revealed early at Madinah, and *al-Barā'at* was one of the latest revealed chapters, and the subject-matter of these two chapters was identical. Therefore I believed that the latter chapter was a part of the former chapter, and the Holy Prophet died, and he did not distinctly say to us that it was a part'." [17]

This report, far from ascribing the arrangement of chapters to the judgment of Uthman, makes it clear that the arrangement of chapters was effected by none other than the Holy Prophet. It shows that, except in the case mentioned in the report, the Holy Prophet had "distinctly" told his Companions where a verse was to be placed in a chapter, or where a chapter was to be placed in the whole. It also shows that the arrangement was effected according to subject-matter by the Holy Prophet himself. In this particular case the Prophet did not distinctly state that the *Barā'at* was a continuation of the *Anfāl*, therefore the two were treated as two chapters, though the *Bismillāh*, not being revealed at the commencement of the *Barā'at*, the latter appeared to be a continuation of the preceding chapter. It only shows how scrupulous the Companions of the Prophet were in carrying out his directions.

5.4: Abu Bakr collected original written manuscripts of the Quran

No written collection could be made while Prophet was alive

The primary work of the collection of the Holy Quran, as shown above, was done by the Holy Prophet himself under the guidance of Divine revelation. But we have seen that such collection was needed only by those who wished to commit the whole of the Quran to memory and that it was in reciting the whole that the

[17] Abu Dawud, book 2: Prayer, ch. 127, h. 786. Tirmidhi, book 47: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 10, h. 3086.

arrangement of chapters was needed. Hence, though the whole Quran existed in a complete and arranged form in the memories of the Companions, yet there did not exist an authorized collection of it in writing. Every verse and every chapter was, no doubt, committed to writing as soon as it was revealed, but so long as the recipient of the Divine revelation lived, the whole could not be written in a single volume. At any time a verse might be revealed which it was necessary to place in the middle of a chapter, and hence the very circumstances of the case made the existence of a complete written volume impossible. Such a collection became, however, a necessity after the death of the Holy Prophet. It was also needed to facilitate reference to and circulation of the Holy Word, and to give it a more permanent form than was secured to it in being consigned to memory. Such was the object with which the collection of the Holy Quran was taken in hand by Abu Bakr.

Need of a written collection first felt by Umar

A reference to the report which describes the circumstances necessitating the collection of the Quran in the time of Abu Bakr confirms the statement made above. The account is given by Zaid ibn Thābit. Soon after the death of the Holy Prophet, Abu Bakr had to send an expedition against Musailimah. A battle was fought at Yamāmah, in which great carnage occurred among the Muslims, and many of the *qurrā'* of the Holy Quran (reciters who had committed the whole Quran to memory) lost their lives.

Umar apprehended great danger, if more reciters fell in some other battle. Straightaway he went to Abu Bakr and advised him to give immediate orders for the collection of the written portions of the Quran into one volume. "A great number of the reciters of the Quran have been slain in the battle of Yamāmah," he said, "and I fear that slaughter may again wax hot among the reciters of the Quran in other fields of battle, and that much of the Quran may thus be lost. In my opinion it is absolutely necessary that you should give immediate orders for the collection of the Quran". "How can I do a thing," replied Abu Bakr, "which the Messenger

of Allah (may peace and the blessings of Allah be on him!) has not done?" "But," urged Umar, "that is the best course under the circumstances." Abu Bakr was convinced, after some discussion, and Zaid was sent for. "You used to write the revelations for the Messenger of Allah. Search, therefore, for (the written portions of) the Quran and collect it (into one volume)." The first impulse of Zaid was the same as that of Abu Bakr. "How can you do a thing," said he, "which the Messenger of Allah (may peace and the blessings of Allah be on him!) has not done?" And so heavy did the task appear to him, that at that time he thought: "It would not have been more difficult for me, if I had been asked to remove a mountain". But at last he was prevailed upon, and began the search.[1]

Written collection was necessary to supplement its preservation in memory

The report quoted above proves several points. Firstly, it shows that the whole of the Quran was safe in the memories of the reciters who had learned it in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet. There was nothing to be feared so long as the reciters were safe, but, if they perished in battles, then, it was feared, certain portions of the Holy Quran might be lost, because the manuscripts of different chapters and verses had not been up to that time collected in one place.

Secondly, it appears from it that the collection of the Quran undertaken in the time of Abu Bakr was meant only to supplement its preservation in memory. The apprehensions in the mind of Umar arose because he feared that, as many reciters had perished in the battle of Yamāmah, many others might be lost in some other battle. Memory was a good repository, no doubt, but such a collection could at any time be entirely lost by the loss of those who retained the Holy Book in memory.

Thirdly, the report proves that up to the time when Abu Bakr took in hand the collection of the written Quran no portion of it

[1] Bukhari, book 65: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 20 under *Sūrah* 9, h. 4679.

had been lost, and that there were still many reciters who had it safe in their memories. To sum up, the report shows that the entire Quran was safe in the memories of the reciters, and that Umar only desired to make a collection of the Quran in writing in addition to the collection existing in the memories of the reciters.

We have now to explain what was meant by Abu Bakr when he said that he could not do a thing which had not been done by the Holy Prophet. Umar's question related, not to the mere collection of the Quran, but to the collection of the Quran in writing. The complete Quran with a perfect arrangement of its chapters and verses existed in the safest of repositories, the memories of men, but the different writings containing different portions of the Quran had never been collected together and arranged. Umar asked Abu Bakr to collect these writings, and this was what the Holy Prophet had not done, and therefore, in the first instance, Abu Bakr refused to do it. But Umar's case was based on strong and sound reasoning. The Prophet himself had done both works: he had every portion revealed to him reduced to writing and committed to memory. Abu Bakr was thus convinced of the truth and advisability of what Umar said.

Original manuscripts made in the Prophet's presence were to be collected

Another point to be elucidated in the report quoted above is the statement of Zaid as to the great difficulty which he thought he was likely to experience in the performance of the task with which he was entrusted. Indeed, he thought that it would not have been more difficult for him if he had been asked to remove a mountain. What were his difficulties? A report narrated by Ibn Abi Dawud makes it clear:

> "Umar publicly announced that whoever possessed any portion of the Quran, which he had directly received from the Messenger of Allah, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, should bring it; and they used to write

> these on paper and tablets and palm-stems shorn of leaves. Nothing was accepted from anybody until two witnesses bore witness." [2]

The object of the collection undertaken by Abu Bakr was to gather together what had been written in the presence of the Holy Prophet. Zaid's collection was meant to secure the original writings, and this was the great difficulty to which Zaid alluded. A great portion of the Holy Quran had been revealed at Makkah, and even the portion that was revealed at Madinah was not wholly in the possession of Zaid. Zaid had to search writings made *in the presence of the Holy Prophet*. He was chosen for the task because he had written the greater portion of the revelation at Madinah and was presumed to have all those copies safe in his custody. But the task before him was a very difficult one. He had to search all the original writings and then give them an arrangement in accordance with that of the verses and chapters as followed in the recitation of the entire Quran from memory, in obedience to the directions given by the Holy Prophet.

That these writings were safe cannot be doubted. Everything relating to Divine revelation was preserved with the utmost care. But the task was no doubt an arduous one, and required hard labour and diligent search; hence Zaid, with a true appreciation of the difficulties before him, said that it was equivalent to the removing of a mountain.

Abu Bakr's orders

There are clear considerations showing that the service with which Zaid was entrusted was the collection and arrangement of the original manuscripts of the different verses and chapters made in the presence of the Holy Prophet. The object of Abu Bakr and Umar was not to have a volume of the Holy Quran prepared by

[2] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 3: *Jam' al-Qur'ān*, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4988 (vol. 8, p. 631).

Zaid writing down the Holy Book as recited by the reciters, but to prepare a book by collecting the original writings. This is the reason that the word *collection* (Ar. *jam'*) is always used in connection with this task, not arrangement or compilation. Hence also the first direction of Abu Bakr to Zaid was to "*search* for the Quran and collect it", and it is easy to see that a search had only to be made for writings. If the object of the new collection for which Umar contended were simply to reduce the Quran to writing as recited by the *qurrā'*, sufficient accuracy could have been obtained by gathering together a few reciters, and Zaid had only to write out the Holy Quran as dictated by them and approved by the Companions. But Umar's object and Abu Bakr's orders were to gather the original writings which had been written according to the directions of the Holy Prophet himself, and thus to make the accuracy of the text doubly certain.

Zaid made a complete search and collected the original manuscripts

The report further tells us that Zaid actually followed this course; for, after being convinced that Abu Bakr and Umar were right, he thus describes what was done:

> "Then I began to search for the Quran, and to collect it from palm-stems and tablets of stone and the hearts of men, until I found the concluding verses of *Sūrah at-Taubah* (ch. 9) in the possession of Abu Khuzaimah al-Ansari, and I did not find them in the possession of anybody else." [3]

This shows that Zaid had two things to do: to search for the writings and to collect them into a single volume. Now, collection required an arrangement of verses and chapters, for the writings themselves were found in the possession of different men, and they could give no clue to the arrangement that was to be followed.

[3] Bukhari, book 65: Commentary on the Quran, ch. 20 under *Sūrah* 9, h. 4679.

It was for the sake of arrangement that Zaid had to resort to the reciters, and it is to this that the words "hearts of men" refer in the report quoted above. In fact, without the help of reciters the collection of the writings in the form of a complete volume was not possible. It was for this reason that Umar urged that the collection should be commenced whilst a large number of reciters were still alive, and it is for this reason that Zaid mentions that in collecting the writings he had to resort to memory, or "the hearts of men", as he puts it. The words do not indicate that he sought for some chapters from writings and for others from memory, for if he could trust memory alone in the case of one part of the revelation, he had no need to search for writings for the rest, and the whole could have been easily written down from the dictation of the reciters.

Abu Bakr's collection in writing accorded with the Prophet's collection as preserved in memory

The most important question with regard to the collection made under the orders of Abu Bakr is: Did it accord in every respect with the Quran as stored and collected in the memories of the Companions, and as repeated and recited, publicly as well as privately, in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet? There is not the least reason to believe that it did not.

In the first place, none of the compilers was actuated by any motive to make any change in the text. The earnest desire of all those engaged in the task was to have a complete and faithful collection of what had been revealed to the Holy Prophet, and Zaid had only undertaken the task after a full appreciation of the difficulties.

Secondly, the collection began only six months after the death of the Holy Prophet, while almost all of those who had heard the Quran from his lips were still alive. The Quran, as recited by the Holy Prophet, was still fresh in the memories of the Companions, and any tampering with the text could have been easily brought to notice.

Thirdly, there were many among them who could repeat the whole of the Quran from memory. There were others who knew large portions, and these were kept fresh in memory by constant recitation in and apart from prayers. It was impossible that any variation from the text as prevalent in the time of the Holy Prophet should have found its way into the collection in the presence of such men.

Fourthly, there were many transcripts of the revelations current among the Companions. And since every verse was written at the time of its revelation, and copies of it were then made by the Companions, there were ample means of testing the accuracy of the collection of Zaid. These writings were in the possession of different Companions, and so they all had a chance to see for themselves that the collection made by Zaid was a faithful collection of the original writings. Moreover, the writings in the possession of one man could be compared with those in the possession of another, and thus, as in the case of recitation, there was no possibility of any error creeping into the text. Memory and writing thus corroborated the already unimpeachable testimony afforded by each.

Fifthly, there is no mention at all in any report whatever that anything was left out of the collection made under the orders of Abu Bakr, or that anything had been added to it which was not considered to be part of the Divine revelation. As Muir says:

> "We hear of no fragments, sentences, or words omitted by the compilers, nor of any that differed from the received edition. Any such would undoubtedly have been preserved and noticed in those traditional repositories which treasured up the minutest and most trivial acts and sayings of the Prophet." [4]

[4] Muir's *Life of Mohammad*, Intro., p. xxvi.

5.5: Uthman ordered further copies from Abu Bakr's original collection

Circumstances which necessitated Uthman's making further copies of the Quran

As shown above, there are strong and conclusive arguments showing that the collection made under the orders of Abu Bakr agreed in every way, in text as well as in arrangement, with the collection made under the direction of the Holy Prophet himself and preserved in memory by the reciters. The collection thus made remained, we are told, in the possession of Abu Bakr, and after his death in that of Umar. After the latter's death, the copy was transferred to the custody of Hafsah, the daughter of Umar, and a widow of the Holy Prophet. Thus the collection made by the orders of Abu Bakr came down to the reign of Uthman without any alteration in its text or arrangement. But some circumstances coming to the notice of Uthman, he deemed it necessary to circulate official copies, transcribed by official scribes, and suppress all those made by private persons, either from the collection of Zaid or from other writings still prevalent among them.

The circumstances which made it necessary are thus described:

> "Anas relates that Hudhaifah came to Uthman, and he had been fighting with the people of Syria in the conquest of Armenia and with the people of Iraq in Azarbaijan. He was alarmed at their variations in the modes of reading, and he said to Uthman: 'O Commander of the Faithful, stop the people before they differ in the Holy Book as the Jews and the Christians differ in their Scriptures'. So Uthman sent word to Hafsah asking her to send him the Quran in her possession, so that they might make other copies of it and then send the original copy back to her. Thereupon Hafsah sent the copy to Uthman, and he ordered Zaid ibn Thabit and Abdullah ibn Zubair and

> Sa'id ibn al-As and Abdur Rahman ibn Harith ibn Hisham, and they made copies from the original copy. Uthman also said to the three men who belonged to the Quraish (Zaid only being a Madinite): 'When you differ with Zaid in anything concerning the Quran, then write it in the language of the Quraish, for it is in their language that it was revealed. They obeyed these instructions, and when they had made the required number of copies from the original copy, Uthman returned the original to Hafsah and sent to every quarter one of the copies thus made, and ordered all other copies or leaves on which the Quran was written to be burned." [1]

The Caliph was told by one of his generals that there were variations in the modes of reading the Quran in such distant parts of the kingdom as Syria and Armenia. No such differences are pointed out to have existed at Madinah or Makkah, or anywhere within Arabia. It was only in newly converted countries, where Arabic was not spoken, that these differences were noticed. As to the nature of these differences, it is stated in clear words that they were only differences in *qirā'at*, or modes of *reading*. But it was feared that, if nothing was done to put a stop to the *slight* differences existing at that time, they might, after the lapse of a few generations, develop into serious ones.

What the differences exactly were, it is difficult to say, but a reference to earlier anecdotes casts some further light upon their nature. We are told in authentic hadith that different modes of reading certain words were allowed by the Holy Prophet himself, and some Companions, unacquainted with the permission, at first severely took to task anybody whom they heard reading any word of the Holy Quran in a different method. The reason for this permission was that people belonging to certain tribes could not pronounce certain words in the ordinary way. These people were

[1] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 3: Collection of the Quran, h. 4987.

allowed to read them in the manner in which they could easily pronounce them. This subject has been more fully discussed further on.

Unnecessary variations in readings forbidden by Umar before

The permission to read any word in a different method was based on a necessity. Only those could avail themselves of this permission who, on account of their being accustomed from their very childhood to pronounce certain words in a certain manner, could not pronounce them in the pure dialect of the Quraish. But when Islam spread beyond Arabia, the need to read certain words in a different method disappeared, for the foreigners could pronounce a word in the dialect of the Quraish with the same facility as in any other dialect. Some people, however, still taught the Quran adhering to certain readings which were not in accordance with the pure style of the Quraish. Some of them may even have abused the permission and favoured certain readings, though they had no need for them. This evil seems to have spread at Kufah, and it was to this that Hudhaifah referred when he was alarmed at the variation in the readings.

This conclusion is corroborated by an anecdote relating to a period earlier than the time of Uthman. Umar was told that Ibn Mas'ud read *'attā ḥīn* instead of *ḥattā ḥīn*, both meaning *till a time*. Now, in the dialect of the Hudhail and the Thaqif, *ḥattā* was pronounced *'attā* (Lane's Lexicon, under *'attā*). Ibn Mas'ud did not belong to either of these tribes, but he favoured a peculiar reading which had been permitted only because people belonging to certain tribes could not utter the word otherwise. When Umar was told that Ibn Mas'ud taught *'attā* instead of *ḥattā*, the Caliph wrote to him that the Quran was revealed in the language of the Quraish, and that he should not read it in the dialect of the Hudhail: "so teach it to the people in the language of the Quraish and not in that of the Hudhail." [2]

[2] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 5, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4992 (vol. 8, p. 644).

Uthman only followed Umar's action

It was to put a stop once for all to the continuity of such variations that Uthman ordered the burning of all private copies of the Quran. The instructions which Uthman gave to the syndicate of the scribes further supports this conclusion. To the members of the committee who belonged to the Quraish he gave the direction (as quoted above on p. 221): "When you differ with Zaid in anything concerning the Quran, then write it in the language of the Quraish, for it is in their language that it was revealed." This direction, we are told, was obeyed. Uthman then went no further than Umar. Only the variations of readings became more pronounced in his time, and became the source of much evil, and he took a step which was calculated to wipe out once for all those variations which Umar also wanted to put a stop to.

The significance of the differences alluded to in the above report is explained by another report, where the words are: "When you differ with Zaid in an *'arabiyyat* in the *'arabiyyāt* of the Quran…".[3] The word *'arabiyyat* signifies the Arabic language. The word clearly implies that by *difference* in the report is meant difference in the method of pronouncing a word in different dialects. Zaid did not belong to the tribe of the Quraish, and hence, when there was a difference in the manner of reading or writing a word, the decision of the Quraish members was to be accepted. The only example of the difference alluded to has been preserved to us in the following anecdote:

> "And they differed on that occasion as to *tābūt* and *tābuh*. The Quraish members said that it was *tābūt*, and Zaid said that it was *tābuh*. The difference was reported to Uthman, and he directed them to write it *tābūt*, adding that the Quran was revealed in the dialect of the Quraish." [4]

[3] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 2: The Quran was revealed in the language of the Quraish and the Arabs, hadith 4984.

[4] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 3, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4988 (vol. 8, p. 636).

This anecdote shows that the differences were really of a very trivial nature, but even such trivial differences had to be removed.

The copies made under Uthman's orders were faithful copies of Abu Bakr's collection

Did the copies transcribed under the orders of Uthman differ from the original collection made by Zaid in the time of Abu Bakr? The report tells us that, when variations of readings were brought to the notice of Uthman, the only action that he took was to obtain the collection made in the time of Abu Bakr, and to have other copies transcribed from it for circulation. Thus copies of the Quran transcribed under his orders were true and faithful copies of the collection of Abu Bakr, which, as we have seen, was in the custody of Hafsah after the death of Umar. Zaid was one of the men who were now called upon to make fresh copies from it. To remove any difference of dialect or variation in the mode of writing certain words that might possibly arise, Uthman gave the orders that the reading of the Quraish should be adopted in preference to any other reading. But the only example of such variation that has been preserved to us in reports is that Zaid read a word as *tābuh* and the Quraish read it as *tābūt*, there being a very slight difference as to the manner in which the final letter of the word was to be written, without there being the slightest change in significance; and such importance was given to this trifling difference that the matter was reported to Uthman for decision.

Hence we have conclusive testimony in our hands showing that the copies of the Quran made and circulated under the orders of Uthman were exact and faithful copies of the original collection of Zaid made in the time of Abu Bakr. Had there been any difference between the original and the copies made, it would no doubt have come to light in the long reign of Uthman or in that of Ali, when Muslims had been divided into factions, and that copy was still in the possession of Hafsah. The men who murdered the aged and venerable Caliph could not have failed to bring to light any difference that might have existed between the copy of Hafsah

and the copies made under his orders. But there is nothing on record to show that any such charge was brought against Uthman even by his murderers.

Uthman's action in burning private copies supported by all

Had the action of Uthman in destroying all private copies of the Holy Quran been arbitrary or unjustifiable, the Companions of the Holy Prophet would never have yielded to it. They, however, not only approved of his action, but also willingly carried out his orders. A request had come to him from distant Syria that he should take immediate steps to put a stop to variations in readings, and this he could not do except by issuing official copies of the Holy Quran as collected by Abu Bakr and suppressing all private copies, which were perhaps not made with sufficient care and might have contained any variation of reading. Nor did Uthman take this step without consulting the Companions. Ali is reported to have said:

> "Do not say anything about Uthman but what is good, for he did not take the step with regard to the suppression of the private copies of the Quran except after consultation with us. He spoke to us, saying, 'What do you think of this reading? I have been informed that some of them say to others, my reading is better than yours. This, I think, may amount to heresy.' We asked him what steps he thought advisable to take in this matter. He replied that he thought it necessary to gather people on one reading. To this we all heartily agreed." [5]

Thus it was only after consultation with the general body of the Companions that Uthman took this step. There are said to have been twelve members in the syndicate which superintended the transcription of the copies. Among these were Zaid, Sa'id, Ubayy, Anas ibn Malik, Abdullah ibn Abbas, and others. It appears that

[5] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* as above (vol. 8, p. 635).

originally there were four members only, but that others were added later on, perhaps because a larger number of copies than that imagined at first was required. Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud was the only Companion noted for his knowledge of the Quran, who was not included in the Committee, but his exclusion was not due to any prejudice against him, but to his residence at Kufah, a considerable distance from Madinah.

Uthman began his work after due consultation with the general body of the Companions, and they approved of his action after its completion. According to a report, Mus‘ab ibn Sa‘d said that he met many Companions when Uthman gave order for burning all private copies of the Quran, and they were all pleased with it, and none of them took exception to it.[6] In fact, Uthman’s apprehensions and those of the Companions, as the words of Ali reported above show, were not due so much to the existence of variations in readings as to the differences resulting from these variations.

The present Quranic Text is exactly as the Prophet left it

The work of collecting the written manuscripts of the Quran was thus carried out by Abu Bakr after the death of the Holy Prophet, and Uthman did nothing but order the necessary number of copies to be made from Abu Bakr’s collection. He acted after consultation with the Companions, securing the services of the most eminent men who were noted for their knowledge of the Quran to carry out and superintend the work of the transcription. The copies made by his orders were recognized as true copies by the whole Muslim world. The bitterest foes of Uthman, who cut off his head while he was reading the Quran and who had the whole power in their hands, never charged him with having tampered with the Quran, though ordering the burning of the copies of the Holy Book was one of their charges against him. Even during the reign of Ali, no one pointed out a word which had been omitted by Uthman, and

[6] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* as above (vol. 8, p. 637).

Ali is himself stated to have transcribed copies of the Quran from the official copies circulated by Uthman. The purity of the text of the Quran is thus conclusively demonstrated.

The collection of Abu Bakr was a faithful reproduction of the revelation as reduced to writing in the presence of the Holy Prophet, and agreed every whit in text as well as in arrangement, with the Holy Quran as preserved in the memories of the Companions; the copies circulated by Uthman were true and faithful copies of Abu Bakr's collection, and these copies have admittedly remained unaltered through the thirteen centuries that have since elapsed.

5.6: Differences of Readings

The significance of differences of readings

Alleged differences of readings are said to interfere with the purity of the Quranic text in two ways. It is alleged that certain readings which had been permitted by the Holy Prophet were suppressed by Uthman, and thus with their loss a portion of the original text was lost. Another objection is that the variety of readings existing at the present time makes it difficult to decide with any degree of certainty as to which is the original or the authentic reading.

These objections really arise out of a misconception of the significance of the word "reading" when used with regard to the Quranic text, and out of confusion between the meanings of *ḥarf* and *qirā'at* when used to denote "reading", and accordingly, it is necessary to inquire first into the true nature of the differences of readings. In the first place it should be borne in mind that the Arabic word used in the reports to denote *reading* is *ḥarf*. This word means "a dialect, an idiom or a mode of expression, peculiar to certain of the Arabs". It is this meaning which the word conveys in the reports speaking of the variety of readings, as Lane himself adds: "So in the saying of Muhammad, *the Quran has been revealed according to seven dialects*, of the dialects of the Arabs:

or this means, *according to seven modes* or *manners* of reading: whence (you say) *Such a one reads in the manner of reading of Ibn Mas'ud*." [1] These quotations would show that differences spoken of in certain reports were only those arising from the variations of the dialects, which necessitated the reading or expressing of certain words in a different manner by various tribes.

Hadith on differences of readings

According to the Hadith, the permission to read the Quran in other dialects was granted when many of the Arabian tribes had embraced Islam, i.e., towards the close of the Holy Prophet's ministry. Conclusive testimony on this point is afforded in Bukhari's report, according to which Umar was surprised by Hisham, who accepted Islam after the conquest of Makkah, reading certain words in a different manner.[2] And it is a fact that more than nine-tenths of the Quran had been revealed before the conquest of Makkah, and the whole of that was revealed in the language of the Quraish. The differences of the readings were only such as were naturally necessitated by the influx into Islam of unlearned tribes, who spoke an idiom which was Arabic for all practical purposes, but which in the pronunciation of certain words differed slightly from the pure idiom of the Quraish.

Examples of these differences have already been given. The Quraish say *ḥattā* (meaning *until*), while the Hudhail pronounce the same word as *'attā*, there being no difference in the significance of the two words. Other variations of the same kind are *ti'lamūn* instead of *ta'lamūn*, as the tribe of Asad read it; *yāsin* instead of *āsin* in 47:15; the reading of *hamzah* (one of the letters of the alphabet), by the Tamīm where the Quraish did not read it; and so on.[3]

[1] Lane's Lexicon, see under *ḥarf.*

[2] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 5: The Quran was revealed in seven different *ḥarf*s, h. 4992.

[3] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* book 66: *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,* ch. 5, commenting on Bukhari's hadith 4992 (vol. 8, p. 645).

In support of the above I may quote the following:

> "The Holy Quran was first revealed in the language of the Quraish and such of the Arabs as were in their neighbourhood and spoke the chaste Arabic idiom; then it was permitted to the other Arab tribes to read it in their own idioms, to the use of which they were habituated from their childhood and they differed (from the pure idiom) in the pronunciation of certain words and the vowel-points. Therefore none of them was compelled to leave his own idiom for that of another, because of the difficulty which they would have experienced in doing so, and because of their great regard for their own idioms, so that they might easily understand the significance of what they read. All this was subject to the condition that there should be no change in the significance." [4]

Reports dealing with this subject point out the reason for which the permission was granted, and in each case we find the reason to be in accordance with what is stated above. For instance, according to one of the reports, the Holy Prophet asked the angel to "make it easy" for his people, showing that they experienced a difficulty in reading it otherwise.[5] According to another, he is made to say that his people "could not bear it" [6] — in other words, all the Arab tribes could not read in one dialect. According to a third, he pleads for his people, saying that they were unlearned, and among them were the old woman and the old man, and the boy and the girl, and the man who had never learned to read a book.[7] Hence they were permitted to read certain words according to their own dialects. We have also one report ending with the words,

[4] *Fatḥ al-Bārī,* as above (vol. 8, p. 644).

[5] Muslim, book 6: Prayers of Travellers, ch. 48, hadith 820a.

[6] Muslim, as above, hadith 821a.

[7] Tirmidhi, 46: Recitation (*al-qirā'āt*), ch. 11, hadith 2944.

therefore read it in the manner in which you find it easy to do so,[8] which shows that the permission to read the Quran in dialects other than that of the Quraish was meant to afford facility to certain people.

To what extent the various dialects in which the recital of the Quran was permitted differed from each other is not a question of much importance, but there seems to be no doubt, as many instances preserved in reports show, that the variations were very slight and generally very unimportant. While holding this on the basis of historical evidence, so far as access can be had to it, we have no reason for denying that in certain cases a word of one dialect may have been allowed to be expressed by its equivalent in another dialect, where the latter dialect did not possess the original word. This is what is meant when it is said in certain reports that the expression of meaning by a synonymous word was allowed in certain cases. Such a case is exemplified in one report by the use of any of the words *ta'āli*, *halumma* and *aqbil*, all meaning "come". This is not an actual case of variation of reading in the Holy Quran but the example is only given to show the nature of variation in such cases. Other variations of reading in these dialects were of a much more insignificant nature, and related to certain changes in vowel-points. Thus the meaning was in no case altered. There were differences in the utterance of certain words, but there was no difference at all in the significance conveyed.

Variations of reading never formed part of the Text

It must be further borne in mind that the variations at no time formed a part of the text of the Holy Quran, nor were they ever meant for permanent retention. The necessity which had given rise to them was of a purely local and temporary nature. They did not in any way alter the text of the Holy Quran as it was originally revealed. The Holy Prophet himself never recited in his public

[8] Bukhari, book 66: Virtues of the Quran, ch. 5: The Quran was revealed in seven different *ḥarfs,* h. 4992.

prayers any portion of the Holy Quran in any dialect other than that of the Quraish, for if he had done so, men like Umar and Ubayy, who said their daily prayers with the Holy Prophet, would not have found fault with dialectic variations, as they are reported to have done. The practice of the Holy Prophet, therefore, shows that the permission to use certain dialectic variations did not alter the original text of the Holy Quran in the slightest degree. Another evidence that the Holy Prophet intended only the dialect of the Quraish to be retained for permanent use, and permitted the variations only for a temporary need, is to be met with in the circumstance that the writing of the Quran, even after the permission as to dialectic variations, suffered no change.

No variation is met with in any copy of the Quran

We may now consider the second objection. It is alleged that the existence of certain readings, which are to be met with in certain hadith and commentaries, makes it uncertain which is the original and the revealed text. Now, whatever may be the nature of the readings referred to above, the one consideration which settles the absolute purity of the text of the Holy Quran is that no different text is met with in any copy of the Holy Quran, anywhere in the world. During all the ages and in all countries, with all the differences, there has been only one text. Not a single one of the alleged various readings has ever replaced any word of the current text anywhere in the Muslim world. There are Muslim countries situated farthest off from each other, there are Muslims who have been separated from each other for long ages, there are Muslim sects bearing the utmost enmity towards each other, yet they have always followed the same text of the Holy Quran, and not a single copy can be produced with a varying text. This certainly is not due to the exercise of any temporal authority for there has never been a single authority over the whole Muslim world. Moreover, if such authority could not or did not interfere with the recital of these readings, there is no reason to believe that it could or did interfere with their writing in the text. Therefore, if the men to whom those

readings are attributed had given them the same value as the critics now give, they would certainly have introduced them into their private copies and replaced the text by those readings. But there does not exist a single copy varying from the received edition in the slightest degree.

I have dealt with this subject in a separate book, *The Collection and Arrangement of the Holy Quran*, and for further information on the differences of readings, as also regarding certain allegations against the purity of the Quranic text, I would refer the reader to that volume. I may, however, here add that, even if a certain person expressed views which were opposed to the collective testimony of all the Companions, it was the collective testimony that was to be accepted. Uthman, as already shown, worked with the consent of the general body of the Companions. Even if it be admitted for the sake of argument that he suppressed anything, it could not have remained hidden after him. Even the men who murdered Uthman did not interfere with the circulation of Uthman's copy of the Holy Quran, nor did they put into circulation a different edition or a new chapter or even a single new verse. They never pointed out that a single word in the Divine revelation had been changed by Uthman. When Uthman's power ceased to exist or when he himself was murdered in cold blood by the insurgents, what hindrance was there then to the circulation of parts which Uthman might have suppressed? The end of Uthman's reign would have seen the circulation of all those parts which, it is alleged, had been suppressed by him, and such parts would no doubt have then been embodied in the copies of the Quran. But history shows no trace of any such happening. With all their differences, different men and different sects have always used one and the same copy of the Quran.

There is only one Quran in the whole Muslim world

It is sometimes asserted that the Shi'ahs regard the Quran as incomplete. The following remarks from Sir William Muir's *Life*

of Muhammad, which has raised and answered this question, will be a sufficient answer:

> "Assuming, then, that we possess unchanged the text of Uthman's recension, it remains to inquire whether the text was an honest reproduction of Zaid's, with the simple reconcilement of unimportant variations. There is the fullest ground for believing that it was so. No early or trustworthy tradition throws suspicions upon Uthman of tampering with the Quran in order to support his own claims. The Shiah, indeed, of later times pretend that Uthman left out certain Surahs or passages which favoured Ali. But this is incredible. When Uthman's edition was prepared, no open breach had taken place between the Umayyads and the Alyites. The unity of Islam was still unthreatened. Ali's pretensions were as yet undeveloped. No sufficient object can, therefore, be assigned for the perpetration by Uthman of an offence which Muslims would have regarded as one of the blackest dye. Again, at the time of the recension, there were still multitudes alive who had learnt the Quran by heart as they had heard it originally delivered; and copies of any passages favouring Ali —had any ever existed — must have been in the hands of his numerous adherents, both of which sources would have proved an effectual check upon any attempt at suppression. Further, the party of Ali, immediately on Uthman's death, assumed an independent attitude, and raised him to the Caliphate. Is it conceivable that, when thus arrived at power, they would have tolerated a mutilated Quran — mutilated expressly to destroy their leader's claim? Yet we find that they continued to use the same Quran as their opponents, and raised no shadow of an objection against it." [9]

[9] Pp. xxiii–xxiv.

To this I would add a few words from a Shi'ah commentator of the Holy Quran, Mulla Muhsin, who says in his *Tafsīr Ṣāfī*:

> "Certain men from among us and the Hashwiyah masses have reported that the Quran has suffered loss and alteration. But the true belief of our friends is against this, and such is the belief of the vast majority. For the Quran is a miracle of the Holy Prophet and the source of all knowledge relating to law and all religious injunctions, and the learned Muslims have taken the utmost pains for its protection, so that there is nothing relating to its vowel-points, its recital, its letters and its verses, which they do not know. With such strong measures of protection and such faithful preservation of the Holy Book [by the Muslims] it cannot be supposed that any alteration or loss could take place" (p. 14).

The learned author goes on to say:

> "Surely the Quran was collected and arranged in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet exactly as it is in our hands. This is inferred from the fact that the Quran was even then recited and committed to memory as a whole, and there was a body of the Companions whose duty it was to commit it to memory. It was also recited and read out as a whole to the Holy Prophet [by the angel]."

Dr Mingana's Leaves

Before concluding this subject, I may make a few remarks about what Rev. Dr A.A. Mingana considers a great discovery — *Leaves from three Ancient Qurans*.[10] These are certain leaves, none of them being a complete copy of the Quran or even a copy of any substantial portion of the Quran, said to have been bought by Dr Agnes Lewis from a commercial antiquary, containing three

[10] Rev. Alphonse Mingana and Agnes Smith Lewis, *Leaves from three Ancient Qurans, Possibly Pre-Uthmanic*, Cambridge, 1914.

writings crossing each other, the oldest of these writings being some passages of the Quran. When these passages were written and who wrote them are questions which Dr Mingana has not answered. All statements to the effect that they are pre-Uthmanic, or copies made from pre-Uthmanic manuscripts, are simply conjectures, boldly put forward as "facts". And what are the differences that are shown to exist? That certain words are written in a different style of writing; that there are some variants (three in all); that there are three omissions, *huwa*, *kāffah* and *mā-lakum* in three places, and that there is one addition, the word *Allāh*.

The bold assertion is made on this basis that Uthman changed the text of the Quran, while even a cursory glance at these "Leaves" shows them to be an additional proof that the text of the Holy Quran is one and the same and has always remained the same, for these leaves do not show the omission, addition or variation of any verse or part of a verse, or any change in the order of chapters or in the order of the verses contained in a chapter, nor do they show that any verse was misplaced. Substantially, the portions of the Quran as found in these manuscripts are the same as in the received text. If there are any differences, they are such as would necessarily arise in the transcription of copies by inexperienced hands. Mistakes would necessarily occur in making transcriptions from other copies and it was to guard against such mistakes that Uthman ordered the official copies to be prepared, so that all copies made should be compared with them and mistakes arising in the transcription should thus be corrected.

It is clear that the very few mistakes discovered in these *Leaves* are the mistakes of transcription by inexperienced hands, as the text given by Dr Mingana clearly shows; for instance writing:

ضل instead of ضلل ; اعرض instead of اعرض

قرن instead of قرآن ; ينللوا instead of ينالوا

اذنا instead of اذاننا ; برکنا instead of بٰرکنا

and so on. These are clear mistakes of transcription, or perhaps sometimes a small vowel-point or part of a letter was obliterated by the rubbing-off process. It is rather amusing to find the purity of the text of the Holy Quran contested, on the basis of stray leaves, containing unknown and uncultured writing, once obliterated to give place to quite another writing. The alleged variations, it may be said without entering into details, are partly due to a slip of the pen of the scribe, partly to the rubbing-off of the vellum for a second writing, partly to cross super-impositions, and partly, perhaps, to doubtful reading on the part of Dr Mingana.

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About the book

This book covers some essential topics, the knowledge of which is required for a proper study and understanding of the Quran.

It is divided into five parts as follows. **Part 1** deals with the basic structure of the Quran, its interpretation, its relation to earlier scriptures, its purpose and its influence. **Part 2** explains the most fundamental teachings of the Quran. In **Part 3** the stories of various prophets in the Quran are summarised and it is shown that these are not borrowed from the Bible. **Part 4** clarifies misunderstandings regarding teachings of the Quran on certain issues. **Part 5** shows how the Quran came to us after being written and arranged during the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

About the author

Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951) was the world-famous author of several highly acclaimed books on Islam, including an English translation of the Holy Quran with commentary. In 1900 he devoted his life for the service of Islam at the call of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, and served Islam with his pen for the next fifty years, producing a voluminous amount of scholarly literature in English and Urdu. In 1914, he became the founding Head of the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam* ('Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam') at Lahore, and till his death he guided the world-wide missionary activities of this organization.

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